

Editorial

Has Expository Preaching had its day?

Preaching has seldom had a good press. 'Don't preach at me' suggests that what is being said is heavy, dull and overtly moralising. But what has become an increasing trend in recent years is the number of voices in evangelical circles which raises serious questions about the efficacy of expository preaching and see it as an anachronism. The most sustained expression of this view is probably *To Preach or Not to Preach* (Paternoster 1996) by David Norrington. Similar views have been expressed by David Hilborn in *Picking up the Pieces: Can Evangelicals Adapt to Contemporary Culture?* (Hodder and Stoughton 1997). In *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (IVP 2001) by Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey there are only two passing references to preaching. At conference after conference expository preaching is said to belong to the modern, rationalistic mindset and fails to engage with post-modern culture. In this editorial I want to take issue with that view and to demonstrate as far as I can that there is a strong Biblical and theological foundation for expository preaching.

My purpose here is not to defend 'bad' expository preaching. By 'bad' I mean sermons which are simply exegetical lectures without application; sermons which are insensitive to the varied literary genres of Scripture; platitudes, albeit Biblically-based, strung together with anecdotes; orthodox sermons which are delivered as if they were announcements of train times; sermons where the preacher's theological grid dictates to the text; sermons which rush to application without responsible work on the text.

Nor am I concerned to defend a particular style of service or length of sermon. Rather I want to try to engage with criticisms which are made even of the best examples of expository preaching. Here I want to deal with faithfulness to the Bible and sound theological principles; in later editorials we shall look at more pragmatic issues. Yet good practice flows from good theology and we shall soon cease to preach effectively unless we are sure of our foundations.

The fundamental question is whether expository preaching is actually faithful to the Bible? The writers

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mentioned, and others, are committed to the authority of Scripture and its supreme importance in the church's life; what they do not believe is that expository preaching is the best or indeed the biblical way to show that commitment. It is argued that such preaching is a product of Enlightenment rationalism. There are five things I want to say.

The shape of the Bible itself seems deliberately designed to emphasise a high theology of the Word. The Pentateuch begins with God's speaking which creates the universe, and ends with sermons by Moses expounding the Covenant. The 'Former Prophets' begin with instructions to Joshua to obey the Torah and in 2 Kings 24: 2 end with the Exile seen as the consequence of disobeying the prophetic word. The writing prophets begin with Isaiah 1: 1 – a vision which is embodied in a word – and end with Malachi urging obedience to the Law and the Prophets. The Writings begin in Psalm 1: 1 with all true worship and godly living arising from obedience to the Torah, and end in 2 Chronicles 36 with the prophetic Word fulfilled.

The New Testament opens with each of the Gospels establishing their continuity with the Old Testament revelation. Acts begins with the teaching of the Gospel and ends with Paul preaching. The Letters all bear witness to the supremacy of the Word (eg. 1 Corinthians 15: 1–11; 2 Timothy 3: 10 – 4: 5; Hebrews 1: 1–2: 4). Revelation begins with the 'Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus Christ' and ends with a warning not to add to or subtract from that Word.

It may be instantly objected that this is an argument for the primacy of the Word of God rather than expository preaching. Two points can be made. The first is that this Word of God comes right into the heart of communities when prophets and apostles speak it. The Word of God in Creation, History, Experience and finally in Christ himself remains inaccessible to us without revelation and for that we need the written word.

Paul did not go round the Mediterranean world handing out copies of the Septuagint

Secondly, in the words of Romans 10: 14 'How can they hear without a preacher?' The Word of God needs to be taught, expounded and applied. Paul did not go round the Mediterranean world handing out copies of the Septuagint. He taught, he reasoned, he proclaimed and preached. Even in Athens (Acts 17) he draws from Biblical theology although without specific references to the Old Testament. The experience of the Ethiopian in Acts 8 is a perpetual reminder of the need for teachers. Good preaching will open the Word of God so that we hear our Master's voice and are led to the living Word, Christ Jesus.

This leads to the second main principle that expository preaching of the written Word leads to the Living Word. Without Scripture Christ soon becomes a projection of our fantasies and desires. The New Testament firmly sets true understanding and exposition of the Old Testament at the heart of knowing Christ. In the Emmaus Road story the Risen Lord does not say, 'You don't need the Bible, you've got me'. Rather, 'beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself' (Luke 24: 27). An even more striking passage is 2 Peter 1: 16ff. where Peter remembers the Transfiguration where the hidden glory of the Son of God was revealed. Peter writes, 'a voice came to him from the Majestic Glory' and that voice is speaking in the words of Psalm 2 and Isaiah 42. Peter further emphasises that it is these words which will lead us to Christ, 'until the day dawns and the morning star rises' (2 Pet. 1: 19). The task of the expositor is the glorious one of pointing to the living Christ. 'I offered Christ to them' said John Wesley; that is a good model to follow.

... the old jingle 'So shut your Bibles up, and tell us how, the Christ you speak about is living now', is so wide of the mark

When we open our Bibles to preach we are not simply unfolding a text, we are bringing people face to face with the living Christ. That is why the old jingle 'So shut your Bibles up, and tell us how, the Christ you speak about is living now', is so wide of the mark. Only by opening our Bibles and unfolding the great story of which Christ is the beginning, the centre and the goal will we introduce others to him.

One further observation on our Lord's own teaching is relevant here. It is often alleged that his own practice is not like that of the expository preacher. He told stories, rather than gave theological discourses. But the parables are more than stories: they are deeply saturated in the Old Testament as well as echoing contemporary life. Often (as in Matthew 13) their meaning is expounded, and even if not, they relate to the big picture of the Bible's story of salvation.

A third main principle is that expository preaching demands a full commitment both to the coherence of the Bible and the diverse literary genres it contains. Preaching through a Gospel, for example, will give a real insight into the living Word in his earthly life and how this relates to the earlier story and that yet to come. It will also give, in varying degrees, opportunities to preach on narrative, discourse, doctrine and various kinds of didactic material. Similarly, a major Old Testament book such as Deuteronomy or 1 & 2 Samuel will be major opportunities to build up people's engagement with the big picture.

Paul in 1 Corinthians 15: 3 gives us guidance on how to preach as we range through the Biblical terrain. We deal with a historical reality — 'Christ died' and that, like the other great Biblical events, is a bedrock of the faith. The factuality of that event is underlined by 'he was buried'. This

carries on in the great Resurrection event which is also dateable — 'on the third day'. But these events have theological meaning — 'for our sins' — taking in the whole story from Genesis 3 and its theological commentary in Romans 5. Moreover these events are embedded in Scripture and to understand them we need to read, mark, inwardly digest and outwardly proclaim. To preach a whole Christ and to create whole Christians we need a whole Bible.

Sinful people, even forgiven sinners, do not think exactly as God thinks and thus our minds must continually be brought under the authority of God's Word. Our emotions must be stirred as well; all good preaching will do this. Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 5: 21, speaks of 'your whole spirit, soul and body kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'. Expository preaching which ranges through the whole Bible and presents the gospel in all its rich variety, comprehensiveness and massive simplicity will be a key factor in that process because it is alive to the realities of God and of the human condition.

A fourth main reason for expository preaching is that Scripture is life-changing. Paul urges Timothy to 'preach the word' (2 Timothy 4: 21) because that word is 'able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus'. Notice the careful language here: it is grace which saves as we respond to God's offer of salvation through faith in Christ. Loyalty to that word and its faithful preaching is the way the church will remain apostolic and pass on the message to each new generation. The aim of good expository preaching is to send people back to the Bible. If exposition is done well people will be sent back with renewed enthusiasm to the Biblical text.

The preacher's words are human and they are fallible. Yet there is an intimate connection between human words faithful to the written word and under the guidance of the Spirit which is part of the process by which the work of God is done in the human heart. A particularly striking illustration of this

is Acts 10: 44 'while Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the word (*logos*)'. Notice that Peter's words and the divine Word are not collapsed into each other but yet the Spirit uses both. Two elements are vital here: faithfulness to Scripture and openness to the Spirit. Faithfulness to Scripture will involve detailed and meticulous study of the text, using the original languages if possible, but certainly different translations. It will mean hard work with the commentaries, wrestling with how we can illustrate the truth, and a real effort to structure our sermons in an interesting and striking manner. Openness to the Spirit will mean a sense of utter vulnerability and weakness of the preacher, well expressed in the words of George Herbert, the poet/preacher of the 17th century:

'Lord, how can man preach thy
eternal word,
He is a brittle, crazy glass'.

It will mean that we prepare thoroughly but also leave room for the Spirit both to prevent us saying things we intended to say and adding others we did not. It means an expectation that when the Word is preached, the Lord who is the Spirit will glorify Christ, often in gentle and barely visible ways but sometimes with great power.

It means that the same Spirit who inspired imperfect humans so to write that, without their words ceasing to be human, they were also the very words of God, inspires, in a secondary sense, those whose imperfect words serve to expound the words of God. Nor does this mean a passive and unthinking congregation. The commendation of the Christians at Berea in Acts 17: 11 is surely a good model for all who listen to expository preaching: 'they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true'. Here are the two elements of joyful and hungry desire to read and learn more and the sober realisation of per-

None of us ever arrive and to the end of our days we will still be labouring to express the truth ever more clearly and powerfully

sonal responsibility for the nature of that learning. All preachers of any experience know the huge difference of preaching to a congregation with a majority of 'Bereans' and to a congregation of complacent believers and hardened unbelievers. Calvin says 'there is nothing more notable or glorious in the church than the ministry of the gospel, since it is the administration of the Spirit and of righteousness and of eternal life'. (Institutes 4: 3: 3)

A fifth area of importance is that of the form of preaching and whether a monologue form is true to Scripture. Sometimes we have not made the case very well and laid ourselves open to reading into the text what we want to. For example, early generations in particular argued on that preaching was the uniquely God-appointed way for the conversion of people. A text much used was 1 Corinthians 1: 21 which in the Authorised Version reads: '... it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe'. NIV and other modern translations, and most contemporary commentaries point out that *kerygma* used here refers not to the act of preaching but to the content of what is preached. So it is often now argued that preaching, as a way of communicating the gospel, has no advantage over others.

Both the old use of this verse and its modern critics miss the point. The work *kerygma* firmly places preaching at the heart of what the apparent foolishness of the gospel is about. It is through preaching, the act of proclamation, that the Word of God brings about the salvation of those who believe. This plainly says nothing about the style of preaching but it certainly does mean proclamation and not discussion. There is a place for discussion and debate but that is not our current concern. The issue is that proclamation faces people with the need for obedi-

ence, repentance and faith and with great realities which must be engaged with. This is not the only way in which the faith can be put in the public arena, but it is indispensable and we need not apologise for it.

Preaching is a great and humbling task. None of us ever arrive and to the end of our days we will still be labouring to express the truth ever more clearly and powerfully. But it is a task in which we have the assurance of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Keep on preaching and never give up.

Note from the Editor

This Journal is now ten years old and it appears to fulfil a need, judging by the number of copies sold. However, we are anxious to be as useful as possible, and that would be greatly helped if more people would make comments on what we offer as well as submitting articles to be considered for publication.

The Editorial sets out a Biblical and theological case for expository preaching. We need to reflect on why we do what we are doing and in particular, to have answers to those who question the centrality of preaching. In later editorials I shall return to the subject but would welcome comments and discussion.

A major issue for our times is the nature of training for the ministry and Robin Sydserff's thoughtful and penetrating article helps us to think through many of the issues. Dick Lucas' article on 'Preaching to Pagans' originally appeared as a letter in Proclamation Trust mailing and is a thought-provoking reflection on Acts 17 and its relevance for today.

Ian Watson strikes a timely note on the need to recognise false teaching and to contend for the faith. His vigorous article should provoke comment and discussion. I have included the substance of two sermons on Jude which I preached recently, which bear on the same subject. Once again I have included a sermon from a pulpit master of the past. Alexander Maclaren's stirring sermon will provide much food for thought. As always, such sermons are not included as stylistic and homiletic models but as eloquent testimony to the preaching and teaching of the 'great cloud of witnesses' who ran the race before us.

Readers always look forward to 'Ann Allen meets...'. It has been a great joy to welcome William Philip's return to Scotland and to the strategic ministry at St George's Tron-Church, Glasgow. Our prayers are with him, Rebecca, Joanna and Juliet, and we look forward to partnership in the work of the gospel.

The Faith once

Ian Watson, Kirkmuirhill

I suppose I always knew it. I trained for the ministry at one of our ancient universities. Some of my fellow candidates and I were light years apart in our understanding of the faith. I was supervised by ministers whose statements sometimes shocked me (for example, I was once told that the Bible is not God's only bestseller). But still the truth didn't really sink in. After all we're a broad church. That's our strength. Isn't it?

Deep down I suppose I always had my suspicions. But in the interests of the peace of the church I never actually came out and said it. I'm a polite boy. My mother always told me that if I couldn't say anything nice, then don't say it. And telling a colleague that I don't think he or she is a Christian isn't nice.

There – I said it. There are ministers in the Church of Scotland who aren't Christians. Now, let me clarify what I mean. Those of us who are ecumenical enough to mix with Baptists and Brethren and other Independent brothers get tired of being asked if a certain colleague is born again. And being loyal to the denomination we might give some non-committal answer ('Well, we wouldn't see eye-to-eye on everything', or, 'I don't think he'd ever ask me to preach for him – but... he's a good man.')

I'm not talking about men and women in our pulpits who can't rhyme off the Doctrines of Grace (even with the help of a TULIP), or who tend to shy away from using the term 'born again' but who by and large are quite

orthodox in their core beliefs. At Christmas they preach the incarnation; at Easter they preach the resurrection. I'm not talking about them.

I'm talking about ministers who are not Christians. Whatever religion it is that they follow it is not Christianity. By no stretch of the imagination could it be called Christianity. There is no historic creed to which they can point that articulates the faith for them. What they believe, what they teach and preach is not merely unbiblical, it is anti-biblical. It is another religion altogether.

I've been forced to this conclusion by reading *Minister's Forum*, the Church of Scotland in-house newsletter for ministers. In particular, recently there have been two long-running debates that have opened my eyes to what some of our colleagues really believe. These have been the homosexuality debate, and the debate about doubt.

Let's take homosexuality first. This has been the no-holds barred debate, the bare-knuckle boxing debate. It has been characterised by ridicule, mockery, venom, sentimentality and, most of all, anonymity (fear of reprisals, apparently).

The most extreme article sympathetic to the homosexual cause appeared in March 2004, written by a retired school chaplain (why are alarm bells ringing in my ears?). I'll ignore his dismissal of claims that homosexual behaviour can be taught via the seduction of youths by older men – claims ably supported by David Searle the following month.

I'm more interested in discovering something of the man's faith. In criticising, no, mocking, a previous contributor, he says:

What are we to make of a person for whom sexual activity can be regarded as 'mere recreation' as if that is some kind of problem? As long as Christians equate homosexuality with sin all the patronising mumbo jumbo in the world will leave gay men and women as alienated from the Church as ever..., and guess what, they'll be several steps nearer their God as a result! It's called having a life.

Recreational sex not a problem; being nearer to God outside the Church. Is this man a Christian?

Another example of ridicule came in the form of an open letter posted on the internet to Dr. Laura Schlessinger, an Orthodox Jew and radio agony aunt in the US. She had said that homosexuality is an abomination according to Lev. 18: 22 and therefore could not in any circumstances be condoned.

The open letter trotted out the now predictable sarcastic questions regarding everything contained in the Old Testament Law. For example:

I would like to sell my daughter into slavery as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7; how much should I charge? I have a neighbour who insists on working on the Sabbath. Am I morally obliged to kill him myself? My uncle has a farm.

Entrusted to the Saints

He violates Lev. 19.19 by planting two different crops in the same field.

The same arguments were made in an episode of *The West Wing*, an American TV programme about a good but liberal president. So they are passing into common currency. What is disturbing is that they are being accepted by the theological literate.

Our own Bob Fyall wrote an excellent piece spelling out quite clearly the classic Christian interpretation of the Old Testament, taking as his authority, I suppose, the book of Hebrews.

Food laws, clean and unclean animals and the like are acted parables of the holiness of God and his concern for all life. They are given to the nation in its youth and reflect the time of childhood with object lessons and visual aids pointing to and superseded by Christ. On the other hand, the prohibition of homosexual acts is related to the right ordering of family relationships and reflects the teaching of Genesis 1 and 2.

If only Bob had been my professor of Old Testament. How helpful. How uncontroversial. Not! In comes the feisty Lindsay Schluter of Larkhall. In a classic example of hearing what you want to hear she lambasts our mild-mannered editor for accusing Jews of having a childish faith, and for being condescending to gays.

Long before I or any other Christian had hit on the idea of welcoming [gays] God had done so. Or maybe I am very remiss in never ever having asked parents whether their child about to be baptised might possibly turn out one day to be gay.

I have to ask myself, what Bible is she reading? What hermeneutics does she employ?

On the same page, Erik Cramb, the national co-ordinator of Scottish Churches' Industrial Mission, compares his disability (he contracted polio as a child) and his realization that it is a gift from God, with homosexuality.

It is missing the possibility of seeing what has been seen as 'the affliction' as 'gift' or perhaps even being deliberately blind to the whole of that person as precious to God. And it is not attacking the authority of scripture to challenge the traditional interpretations of scripture about people who are lesbian or homosexual.

So, it's not scripture that is being attacked, but 'traditional interpretations of scripture'. Four thousand years of consistent Biblical interpretation thrown out the window by the least biblically literate generation ever.

But there's more. How about this approach to scripture from a retired minister:

Surely, however, if our Church is to be truly Christian our final authority can only be Jesus Christ himself along with the abiding presence of his Holy Spirit in the world. It is from them that the Bible receives whatever authority it has.

And just where do read about Jesus? Where do we get this idea that the Holy Spirit is Christ's abiding presence in the world? Readers of this *Journal* do not need me to cite passages illustrating the Lord's view of scripture. To be Christian is to be Biblical.

'God is love' has replaced 'Jesus is Lord' as the most basic credal formula. Yet how does anyone know that God is love? Not from nature. Certainly not from observing human nature. Only the Bible tells us 'God is love'.

In a refreshing display of naivety a young Dundonian minister wrote to *Ministers' Forum* about vacancy adverts:

My own personal pet-hate is the phrase 'Bible-based ministry'. Whether a minister comes from the liberal or conservative wing of the Church – what on earth else can they base their ministry on?

Good question. But remember – the Bible isn't God's only bestseller. The presenting issue may be homosexuality, but the heart of the matter is the authority of scripture. Can you be a Christian and not accept scripture as your rule of faith?

If that is not clear cut enough for you, let's move to the second debate, the debate about doubt. If the homosexual debate was bare-knuckle boxing, this discussion is more akin to the mind-games of chess and poker. The debate began in June '03 when an article from the *Daily Telegraph* about the beliefs of Church of England clergy was reprinted. According to that article about a third of Anglican clergy doubt or disbelieve the physical resurrection of Christ and only half are convinced of the truth of the virgin birth. Again only half stated that they believe salvation is found in Christ alone.

A couple of minnows responded to this. One asserted that no one who professes certainty is ever fully to be trusted. So good-bye Peter, good-bye Paul. The Lord Jesus, when challenged by the Sadducees about marriage in heaven, didn't concede that they had a good point, or that they were entitled to their opinion:

'Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?' (Mk. 12: 24)

Another claimed that those who question the virgin birth are not unbelieving. They do believe:

They believe that God is consistent and does not occasionally suspend the normal working of the world.

That alone tells me that this fellow does not believe in the God of the Bible. What God he believes in I do not know. But as I read it the whole point of the Biblical revelation is that God does occasionally suspend the normal working of the world.

These were the minnows. The giant of doubt came in the form of the Revd Scott McKenna, minister of Edinburgh's affluent Mayfield Salisbury Parish Kirk. Scott is the epitome of the Moderate churchman, a man who would have been perfectly at home in the post-Disruption church. He begins:

God is beyond definition. Later, however, he contradicts himself by insisting on –

a God whose nature at its deepest depth is love.

With typical generosity he assures us:

I have no problem in accepting that many Christians including some among the clergy hold to the literal truth as we commonly understand that term of the Resurrection and Virgin Birth. I have no problem in accepting also that many Christians believe that Jesus is the only route to salvation. These are not views that I share.

So what does he believe?

To me, the Resurrection and Virgin Birth accounts are myths in the same sense as those of the creation accounts. We can read these texts allegorically without ever departing from the truth of the text.

They are myths, but they are true. How?

If they inspire faith in the Christ-God in those who read the accounts as they do in me, then indeed they are true and God has spoken through them without the accounts ever being literally true.

The resurrection, sorry, Resurrection of Christ is a myth on the same level as, say, the Promethean myth. That's an inspiring story too. The man who steals fire from the gods. Myths are powerful. But myths are not history.

Scott believes Jesus is still dead. God didn't vindicate him. Then how can he be the Christ-God? How can anyone be inspired by a failure? And what happens to me when I die?

Can you be a Christian and believe that Jesus is dead? Or that it's all just a made-up story?

That's what I meant when I said at the start that I have come to the conclusion that colleagues who hold such

views are not Christians. Whatever their religion, it's not Christianity.

I know that I will be accused of being judgmental. I hear the Lord's admonition: *Do not judge*, and Paul's sharp rebuke:

Who are you to judge someone else's servant. To his own master he stands or falls. (Rom.14:4).

However, may I suggest that here it's the liberals who are the literalists. The Lord isn't telling us to throw away our critical faculties. Almost within the same breath as *Do not judge* comes his warning to watch out for false prophets. And he has spent most of the Sermon on the Mount lambasting the hypocritical Pharisees.

Paul himself was perfectly prepared to expose those who preached another gospel and call down anathemas upon them. When the gospel is at stake, the core of what we believe, and consequently the eternal destiny of our people, surely we cannot be silent?

What's to be done? A friend of mine from abroad vehemently pressed me to pray that the Lord would remove liberal ministers from church, by death if needs be! Make of that what you will! All I'll say is that I do believe the situation is one that needs concerted prayer.

Ideally the ministers I have cited should be disciplined. I honestly do not think they are Christians, and therefore they should be dismissed from their charges. Now back to reality. That's not going to happen.

Should I separate myself from them?

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. (2 Cor. 6: 14)

Yes and no. Yes, I separate myself from them in that as far as I am able I do not have fellowship with them. I dissuade my congregation from attending services at which they preach. More than that, I write articles like this one demonstrating that I do not want to be associated with their thinking.

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But no, I do not leave the Church of Scotland. Not yet anyway. Such heretical views are not in the majority. And I am not going to abandon my flock to these wolves.

And one last point, in my preaching I try to teach my congregation to recognize false doctrine as well as appreciate Biblical truth. They need to know what a particular passage does not mean as well as what it does mean. They need to know that certain implications and conclusions are invalid. When this is not done a congregation will be easily deceived by anyone who can preach persuasively.

Preaching to Pagans

Dick Lucas, London

For many years, Dick Lucas was Rector of St Helen's Bishopgate in the heart of the City of London. One of his ministries was Tuesday lunchtime services to the business community, and in this article he draws on his many years of experience to those outside the Christian church.

What does it take to be a Preacher to Pagans, whether of the religious or irreligious variety? My answer is that the ancient patterns are still the best for the modern preacher, as long as they come from the Bible. A prime example is to be found in Paul's 'speech' (I prefer 'sermon' in as much as, after preaching, only small children have ever thanked me for my 'speech') to the men of Athens. One of the happy changes to occur in my lifetime has been the rehabilitation of this great discourse in Acts 17 (where, self-evidently, only the sermon 'skeleton' is

given) as rightly a model for today's Christian evangelist. As such some excellent studies of it are now in print. However, there comes a time when every preacher wants to make his own investigation of Paul's method, and draw out some conclusions for himself. This I have tried to do. So, idiosyncratic or not, here is the outcome of recent cogitation in which I have attempted to pin-point the characteristics of preaching that will tell for God in an idolatrous world. If there turns out to be something slightly disconcerting in such a study, it is the resultant conviction that in this marvellous calling to preach the Truth as it in Jesus one is still only a beginner.

1. Powers of Reasoning

Note the verbs Luke uses to describe his hero's preaching. For instance, arriving in Thessalonica (Acts 17: 1-4), Paul 'reasoned' = 'argued' with members of the synagogue on three Sabbaths, 'explaining and proving' that Christ (Messiah) had to suffer, and rise from the dead. So convincing was his

proclamation of Jesus as the Christ that some Jews were 'persuaded', and joined Paul and Silas, along with many Godfearers as well as 'not a few' prominent women.

In Acts the Christian converts are often described as the 'persuaded'; this is hardly common parlance today.

On leaving Athens, there is no suggestion that the great missionary apostle changed his normal practice. 18: 1-4 tells how Paul lodged with fellow tent-makers, plying his trade and presumably paying his way, while regular visits to the synagogue were made, in which once again he 'reasoned' with the people, seeking to 'persuade' Jews and Greeks. Chapter 19: 8 continues the same story, which extends right through to the end, with Paul in a rented house, still 'explaining' and 'convincing' all but those whose minds were closed, and who would never believe (28:23-31).

The old suggestion that 'failure' in Athens (how thankful I would have been for similar lasting faith among a few hearers, as a result of addresses given in Senior Common Rooms during University Missions!) caused Paul

to jettison all intellectual skills thereafter, forsaking rational arguments in his preaching, in order simply to placard 'Christ and him crucified' before his hearers, has had a long life – understandably perhaps in the light of 1 Cor. 2: 4 'not with wise and persuasive words'. But it is the subtle and beguiling persuasiveness based on this world's wisdom, which his opponents were later to use with so much numerical success, that Paul always hated (Col. 2: 4). A majority reading of 1 Cor. 2: 4 inserts 'human' before 'wisdom', and though this must be accepted as a secondary reading, it exactly makes Paul's point. He would not enforce his proclamation by 'the wisdom of the world' (1: 20), for by this wisdom no one ever came to a knowledge of God. Of this fact a century of liberal and rationalistic theology, and such preaching as it produces, should finally have persuaded all but those whose prejudices are invincible.

So, whether it was this world's wisdom or this world's ways of persuasion as practised by the Corinthian superstars (2 Cor. 2: 17, 4: 2), Paul renounced them both. Nevertheless, since he knew what it was to fear the Lord, he still sought to persuade men (2 Cor. 5: 11); this was at the heart of his ministry of reconciliation.

Back then to the Areopagus, where what was heard that day was emphatically not 'the wisdom of this age'; the Athenians knew all about that, but this new teaching was different. Reading Paul's words today however we cannot miss the relentless logic, the close reasoning and the irresistible conclusion. If verses 22–31 record the structure of Paul's sermon, it is marvellously tight, ordered, and clear. The 'argument' is as follows:

Athenian Ignorance of God

Introduction (Acts 17 22,23)

- I see how religious you are!
- I see how ignorant of God you are!
- I will now tell you of him!

Main material

(24–28: looks very like a three-pointer!)

Paul overturns the ignorant assumptions of his audience with three great denials, after which he builds a right understanding by proclaiming God as Creator, Sustainer, and Goal of all human existence.

Conclusion (29–31)

- Their idolatry is unthinkable.
- Their ignorance is intolerable.
- Their judgement is inevitable.

Thus, their immediate duty is to repent.

It is the conscience that Paul is out to reach – not just the intellect – and very plain speaking is necessary in order to reach it

Preaching to Pagans today demands similar coherent, discriminating outlines that will lead, by sound reasoning, to the refutation of error and the establishment of the truth. The 'therefore' of v. 29 is a hammer blow, just because the preceding links in the chain have been so well made. Everyone has been made to think. The fact of Christ can no longer be ignored.

Not, please notice, that the language used is sophisticated or complex – the 'superior wisdom' of 1 Cor 2: 1, so loved by the proudly intellectual. Our doctrine of inspiration guarantees that Luke's report accurately mirrors the sort of terminology used. All is straightforward and clear. Luther's maid-servants in Wittenberg would have understood every word. It is the conscience that Paul is out to reach – not just the intellect – and very plain speaking is necessary in order to reach it (2 Cor 4: 2b).

In a little book on Pastoral Work, dated 1890 (written by a previous Rector of St Andrew Undershaft, W. Walsham How, and recently sent to me by a friend) there is a chapter on

preaching. It includes the following delightful if unflattering paragraph.

‘You cannot believe too firmly in the ignorance of your listeners. Take nothing for granted. Explain what to you seems simple, and do not be afraid of repetition. It is by no means a bad plan to look round your congregation and single out the most dense-looking among them, resolving to do your best to make that particular person understand you.’

It seems that this is exactly what Paul did when addressing his distinguished audience in Athens!

So it is, in preaching to pagans; the ground is already occupied, religious or irreligious opinions firmly in place

2. Demolition skills

The demolition of office blocks was something I regularly witnessed during my time in the City of London. Often these enormous buildings were of no great age or had been newly refurbished. But down they came. What the developer paid his millions for was not the building but the site. So it is, in preaching to pagans; the ground is already occupied, religious or irreligious opinions firmly in place. We cannot start to build, as Paul demonstrates in the Athenian sermon, without first demolishing the old well-established structures.

In a different context (2 Cor 10: 3–5) Paul describes the weapons with which such spiritual battles are fought. They are not the weapons of this world (as in Point 1), yet they have ‘divine power to demolish strongholds’. So the preacher, in his special work, must of necessity demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God.

How effectively before the men of Athens Paul set about this work of

demolition! Consider as two examples verses 24 and 25, where the apostle’s skills in engaging with his Epicurean and Stoic hearers are frequently commented upon. Far more important, however, is the way in which he subverts everything that Athenian religion stood for, with two great negations. First (v.24), *God does NOT dwell in temples made by human hands*. The Greeks had created magnificent structures in honour of their deities, the remains of which modern tourists still see with wonder and admiration. Manifestly Paul was no wandering tourist, yet he did not deny the costly and beautiful materials, nor the prodigies of imagination and skill that went into these architectural marvels (v.29). It was Athenian thinking, not craftsmanship, that was all wrong; to create deity in our human image was to turn reality upside down.

Far from living in man-made temples as, for instance, did golden Athena in the Parthenon, the Lord of Heaven and Earth created this beautiful world, and everything in it, for human habitation. It is he who builds a home for us!

Secondly (v.25) *God is NOT served by human hands*, as if he needed sustaining by his creatures. Yet, round the clock, devoted Greek hands performed their worship obligations to their gods and goddesses at innumerable shrines. It seemed that ceremonies would never cease, nor the hunger of the gods for offering ever be satisfied. If religious zeal is in question the people of Athens could not be faulted. Yet they have no understanding that it is the true God who has given help to them, as to all men everywhere, sustaining them in existence each moment by every breath, and providing for them all things necessary for their enjoyment in the world he has created for them as their present home.

It is a powerful exposition of foundational Bible truths; and, as such, it destroys finally and for ever the claim of ‘Religion’ (hardly a biblical word at all, as Alan Richardson used to say) to bring us near to God. Nevertheless, God is NOT far from any of us, as the

... in a fallen world where human beings are naturally idolatrous, murderous and adulterous, the Decalogue is bound to be given in a negative form

failure of the Athenian religious search had suggested.

Such demolition work, such great denials, are the very stuff of New Testament teaching. We cannot be Christian teachers of integrity if we accept all that the apostles affirmed but refuse to acknowledge what they denied. Positive statements are regularly interpreted by negative ones, as in the famous John 14:6 – to celebrate 6a yet disregard 6b is to empty Christ's words of their original force, and by implication reject his authority.

'Negative' teaching has a bad press in today's church, yet it is inevitable. For example, in a fallen world where human beings are naturally idolatrous, murderous and adulterous, the Decalogue is bound to be given in a negative form. We are not to bear false witness because it is the easiest thing in the world to do!

Just so, sinful men and women naturally think and believe about God that which is erroneous and absurd. Thus the trustworthy teacher must expose and rebuke senseless and false thinking, as Paul did in Athens.

Paul is wonderfully faithful in this unpopular ministry. Do not all men, religious or not, seek to establish their own righteousness? Then Paul must insist that salvation is 'NOT of works' (Eph 2:9), and 'NOT because of righteous things that we have done' (Titus 3:5). Such *great denials* are an indispensable part of the proclamation of God's free grace in Christ.

Perhaps surprisingly it is not Paul but John, the Apostle of Love, who is the demolition expert of the New Testament. From the Prologue onwards, with its repeated denials (3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 13, 18) John enforces divine truth. Students of homiletics will gain much

from a study of this remarkable characteristic running through the entire Gospel of John. For a preliminary crash course, try John 3 on the New Birth, or John 6:25-59 on the Bread of Life.

It is here that acceptable easy-going preaching falls short. It is agreeable to be known as a 'positive' preacher; and if, as my Thesaurus suggests, this means 'clear, definite, direct, precise unequivocal and real' we are right to applaud. While if 'negative' means harsh, sour, ill-natured, unfeeling and ungracious, who would wish to defend so distasteful a spirit of bitterness? But in the Christian revelation there is a 'no' as well as a 'yes'. And if Paul on this occasion in Athens had not been the trusty voice of his Master neither the Athenians nor we would have heard the shocking truth about man-centred 'religion' and its dire consequences.

Shaping Church Structures

Jared Hay, Balerno

This paper was given at the SETS conference on 31st March 2004 and was concerned with asking questions about how a missionary church would organise its life and what structures would be appropriate. This goes to the heart of the church's *raison d'être* and whether mission or worship is nearer that heart, and how indeed do these interact.

First, Evangelicalism has not been strong on ecclesiology as a whole and the shape of the Church, or church order, in particular. It has been more interested in individual salvation than corporate life; more interested in the gospel that unites us than the church order that divides us. It has treated the shape of the church as a secondary issue, if that.

Second, my personal impression of evangelicals, perhaps especially of previous generations, is that when they

think of 'Church' they think first and foremost of the Church universal and the eschatological destiny of the Church rather than Church local and Church here and now. The effect of this has also been to play down the issues relating to the shape of the Church locally in the present.

Third, the Church has perspectives from both the divine and the human. From the human perspective, as a human institution, organisation is inevitable. We cannot be without it. The Christian community always has an institutional form. The question is, what shape is it?

I want to approach the theme from three perspectives, with mission in mind as we do so.

1. Biblical – is there a standard Biblical shape to the Church? Look at the Church in its early missionary zeal.
2. Theological – how might the wider theological picture influence the shape of the Church?
3. Practical – mention some practical issues that affect shape.

1. Biblical – Is there a standard Biblical shape to the Church?

The data is scarce and there is a danger of over-interpreting.

The Gospels: the shape of the Jesus Community

What did the Gospel writers want to emphasise in their reflections on Jesus' Community. Jesus and his disciples provide a forgotten paradigm of community formation. Jesus' ministry is not only inspirational but normative and ecclesologically formative (Craig Evans, *Community Formation* 71). To those who might say, 'That's all very well, but Jesus is no longer with us', our Lord himself has given us the Spirit – the Spirit of Jesus – to be the presence of Jesus when Jesus is absent.

The Jesus Community:

- Shaped by the Kingdom which is healing, forgiveness, fellowship, prayer, and proclamation.

- A similar point – this is shaped by the person of Jesus towards the likeness of Jesus; shaped to be the kind of community God had intended Israel to be.
- Community of concentric circles – 3, 12, 70 and crowds.
- Community of surrogate kinship which is closer than Jesus' own family.
- The Gospel of Matthew presents structures in which the Apostles have a 'key' role (16:19); community structures include discipline (18:15 ff.)
- Mark shows coming and going in the community e.g. 3:14 together to be with Jesus then to go and preach.
- Luke emphasises the inclusion of the marginalized, pointing forward to the inclusion of the Gentiles in Acts.
- John tells us that the group was organised enough to have a treasurer, Judas, who carried the money bag and stole from it.
- So we have a community that had a head (Jesus), group leadership (Peter [and James and John?]) and a treasurer (Judas).

The Community of Jesus has loose structures, but is moulded both by Jesus himself and the values of the Kingdom of God.

Acts: the shape of the Church in missionary narrative

Some narrative in Acts has been shaped to emphasise the picture of the Early Church fulfilling OT texts relating to the blessing of God on his people.

There is an early picture in Acts of continuation of the Jesus Community in Jerusalem meeting, praying and replacing Judas with Matthias. This would only happen as the group expected to have some continuity into the future. The structure is informal with the eleven present, Peter giving the lead. This is discussed in *Guided Democracy* – Kevin Giles.

With Pentecost the Spirit fills them, people ask questions and Peter's preaching is successful: what do we do with 3,000 converts? An immediate organisational problem, but we're not told how it was resolved. There are

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many visitors who head home to share the Good News there. We don't know what structures they might have set up.

Acts 2:42 – what the Church was doing. Organisation structured around learning (belief and behaviour), eating, sharing and praying. None of it obviously missional but the community's impact was certainly missional. Daily additions to the group obviously raised organisational issues. Despite growth they seem to have retained the previous informal structures and this lays up problems.

Acts 6 – How do we sort out the complaints about the food programme? We get hints that the Apostles had been trying to take this on board as well as their previous role, and thus they appoint six people to administer the food programme. These people have qualifications of gifts and character; names put forward by the community.

Persecution arises around the death of Stephen – who should lead the Jerusalem Church in the absence of the Apostles? The twelve are not deemed necessary as on-going guarantors of the tradition. But why did James get the job? It is difficult to see past his kinship with Jesus, although that would not be a sufficient reason for him being appointed leader. The Jerusalem structure has been portrayed as more 'monarchical' than the Pauline churches. Authority is based on character, commitment and gifting, encapsulated in Barnabas, delegate of the Jerusalem Church to Antioch.

We see establishment of local congregations in Acts with their leadership of 'elders' and 'overseers'. These are traditionally seen as one, but if so, they are to be seen from different perspectives. 'Elders' were older men who were respected in the community, and especially so if the early congregations were formed round extended family groupings. Certainly the community is one of surrogate kinship where members are 'brothers and sisters'. There is kinship, loyalty, sharing goods and shared destiny. (Cf. Mafia families and Dons!) The title 'overseer' reflects a ministry of supervision that implies

some kind of authority structure. The picture is of collegial leadership given by those to whom the community would naturally look, within which some had a particular roll of supervision.

Antioch shows the pattern of a Jewish/Gentile Church but we are given details only of leaders.

In Acts 15 we have the story of the Jerusalem Council. Paul and Barnabas disagree with some of the Jerusalem preachers and the issue is one that the mixed church in Antioch feels constrained to challenge the church in Jerusalem about. I have a sense that Jerusalem is the senior partner here – the mother church – and that issues of importance to the existence of the Church and its intrinsic nature need to be approved by Jerusalem. Paul's contacts with Jerusalem, Peter and James, need to be teased out to discover how much associations with Jerusalem were important to how he viewed Peter and James, but at first glance one senses their associations with the mother church were important. I wondered why there were not more Jerusalem Councils, but perhaps the simple answer is that it was too dangerous, and as the faith spread Jerusalem became too distant geographically and spiritually to make such councils practicable. Its destruction removed the option. By the time of the later ecumenical councils the churches were much more developed and organised, making conciliar action much more possible.

Major Pauline letters – the call for order and the need for systems

In Paul's missionary community Paul was always the leader, even in prison. This varied in size and personnel and was almost the equivalent of a parachurch evangelistic group, always involved with Churches, but alongside all of them to serve their needs.

The purpose of the letters was to create stability in the local churches. Order was deemed to be from God, chaos from the enemy. A three-fold development can be discerned: Kevin

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Giles – Community-building institutionalisation (early), community-stabilising institutionalisation (mid), and community-protecting institutionalisation (later).

The local church was the embodiment of the church universal so that each was not a church but the church of God.

Authority in the community was vested in Christ. Any church authority is derivative and functional.

When we consider interaction of local churches, we see informal links and only the merest hints of mutual accountability and oversight eg. the churches in the Lycus valley and reciprocal reading of letters making believers aware of what has been asked of them. The collection was a sign of Christian unity and care.

Functional diversity of members is illustrated in 'body' and 'household'. Metaphors give a message of order, structure and system.

'People of God', a covenant metaphor, shows some kind of continuity with Israel; it would have been natural for Jewish Christians to shape their covenant community in Jewish ways.

Gentile 'voluntary associations' were a near-to-hand influence on the structuring of Christian groups.

Place in congregation was determined by age, gifting, character and commitment, and there was freedom to express individuality within community so long as it didn't become a 'free-for-all'. Tension developed between individual charismatic freedoms and order was needed for church life to develop in community.

While there was patronage of congregations by wealthy home owners, God was overall patron of the community, but there was a need for local patrons to provide meeting places.

The picture of the major Pauline letters is that the Christian communities developed structures and that they adapted structures that were close to hand.

The Pastorals

Congregational recognition of leaders was on a basis of function and character and this leadership was a collegial one of elders and deacons. There was a system of discipline – code of the household of God. Apostolic delegates derived their authority from the apostles and set up a system of pastoral care and counsel as well as encouragement to ‘do the work of an evangelist’.

Other letters

Not a great deal about church structures but note the letter of James where elders take responsibility of visiting the sick to anoint and lay on hands.

Conclusions

There was no standard shape to Church life, but it would include the elements of leadership, service and mission. Shaped by Christ as head, Kingdom values, the local need (form follows function), culture of the place and the people, gifts of those involved. This is not an exhaustive but a fairly wide-ranging look at the NT evidence.

2. Theological: how does the wider theological picture inform the shape of the Church?

Calvin reflects on the Church under ‘means of grace’ and sees the ‘Mother’ Church to be a place of nurture. In Reformation, the hierarchical ordering of the Church was not adapted but not overthrown; the Christendom model of the Church was not overthrown.

The dominant metaphors for Church were Body, Temple, Bride, Pilgrim People... Probably quite soon the tendency towards maintenance rather than mission became established.

Place in congregation was determined by age, gifting, character and commitment, and there was freedom to express individuality within community so long as it didn't become a 'free-for-all'

Theological theme and Effect

Trinity Life is relational and to reflect this structures must foster relationships which are communal, ecumenical and egalitarian.

Creation God is responsible for the existence of the church and thus creative responses to organisational problems are appropriate.

Christology Incarnation implies structures in the culture of the people, also challenging culture. The Cosmic Christ is the ruler over all and structures must be under his authority.

Spirit Diversity of people and communities; guidance of the Spirit which leads to the truth.

Covenant The Covenant with Abraham involves blessing for the whole world. Isaiah shows this extending the boundaries. Church life throws us out into the world as well as drawing us into relationship.

Salvation Faith is centred on death and resurrection; structures must die for others to live.

Eschatology Structures are provisional, until all are brought together at the end.

Humanity Structures created by fallen people are fallen structures and none are perfect.

Church How do our structures reflect unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity? How is the Reformed principle of *semper reformanda* being implemented in our structures?

Mission If mission is first and foremost the ‘mission of God’, how do our structures encourage and facilitate the Church’s sharing in the mission of God to the world?

3. Practical issues affecting the shapes of the Church

Traits of developing culture

Transitions are happening at various points of development from modern culture to postmodern culture. Fragmentation, network society, complexities of family life all affect in-

stitutional life and structures. Many churches like my own congregation are situated in a largely traditional culture but within a wider developing postmodern culture. This creates tension between the shape that suits the older culture and the shape that suits the newer culture. Does one have to win or can both exist? Surely the structures of church life can and should be created to be flexible enough to cope with life at this point of liminality.

The Christendom model of church life is passing and our influence on national life is waning. Church structures must be created that are designed to deal with our marginality.

Traits of present generations

- Pre-war
- Boomer
- Buster
- Generation X

The generations feel as if they are getting shorter and each has its own characteristics. The formation of community could happen in different ways for different age groups.

Need for different sized groups and the effect of size on structure

Human sense of belonging is needed at different levels. Church Growth gives us the idea of cell, congregation and celebration. A very helpful rule of thumb and our structures should reflect these different needs. Church at different levels must be experienced differently.

There is also a difference in group dynamics depending on the size of congregation. Structures must be adapted to suit the number of people who belong to the group.

Examples of structure: how adequate are they?

Congregational – is the emphasis on the autonomy of the local congregation appropriate in the light of the doctrine of the Trinity and the fellowship of the

Spirit with the emphasis on the relational? Does the Jerusalem council not give warrant for mutual ecclesial accountability?

Presbyterian – is the emphasis on the structures of Church law flexible enough to deal with the needs of a fast changing culture? Is the parish system the best one for the times or is it no longer appropriate to situations where local geography is not an issue to people interacting?

Episcopalian – is the hierarchical structure shaped by the upside-down values of the Kingdom?

***The Christendom
model of church life
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Robert Warren:

- New ways of being Church
- Renewing existing ways of being church
- Dispersed ways of being church

A number of writers draw attention to different ways of being church:

- Martin Down – detached or attached? Anglican but non-parochial
- NCD – parochial but flexible (Fred Drummond's experience)
- Area Groupings (multi-parish teams: range of gifts in team; hampered by structures)
- Steve Croft – Transforming Communities
- Brian McLaren – Emerging Church
- Pete Ward – Liquid Church
- Mission Shaped Church – mixed economy; territorial and networks

Anglican and Presbyterian Church planting are hampered by denominational constraints. We need to adopt structures to facilitate rather than impede. Cells, café, networks can work alongside traditional church plants. We need to think geography, think network, think however people interact – create church where people are.

Conclusion

'If mission is near the heart of the Church's *raison d'être*, what shape should the Church take?'

Unsatisfactory ending. No uniform answer to the question. Instead, I have a series of qualifiers. The shape is whatever shape works best so long as –

- It is contingent upon the headship of Christ
- It is shaped by the values of the Kingdom
- It is created in the light of the main theological themes of the faith
- It is collegial
- It is created for the culture of the local people
- It is appropriate to the size of the group
- It is developed for the needs of the time – including missionary needs

What shape is that? You have to figure it out for yourself! Make the shoes fit the feet, don't make the feet fit the shoes.

Salt without Savour

A Sermon by Alexander Maclaren

'Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is henceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men'.

Matt. 5: 13.

These words must have seemed ridiculously presumptuous when they were first spoken, and they have too often seemed mere mockery and irony in the ages since. A Galilean peasant, with a few of his rude countrymen who had gathered round him, stands up there on the mountain, and says to them, 'You, a handful, are the people who are to keep the world from rotting, and to bring it all its best light'. Strange when we think that Christ believed that these men were able to do these grand functions because they got their power from Himself! Stranger still to think that notwithstanding all the miserable inconsistencies of the professing Church ever since, yet, on the whole, the experience of history has verified these words. And although some wise men may curl their lips with a sneer as they

say about us Christians, 'Ye are the salt of the earth', yet the most progressive, and the most enlightened, and the most moral portion of humanity has derived its impulse to progress, its enlightenment about the loftiest things, and the purest portion of its morality from the men who received their power to impart these from Jesus Christ.

And so, dear brethren, I have to say two or three things now, which I hope will be plain, and earnest and searching, about the function of the Christian Church, and of each individual member of it, as set forth in these words; about the solemn possibility that the qualification for that function may go away from a man; about the grave question as to whether such a loss can ever be repaired; and about the certain end of the saltless salt.

The high task of Christ's disciples

'Ye are the salt of the earth!' The metaphor wants very little explanation, however much enforcement it may require. It involves two things; a grave judgment as to the actual state of soci-

ety, and a lofty claim as to what Christ's followers are able to do to it.

A grave judgment as to the actual state of society. It is corrupt and tending to corruption. You do not salt a living thing. You salt a dead one that it may not be a rotting one. And, says Christ, by implication, what He says plainly more than once in other places – 'Human society, without My influence, is a carcase that is rotting away and disintegrating. And you, faithful handful, who have partially apprehended the meaning of My mission, and have caught something of the spirit of My life, you are to be rubbed into that rotting mass to sweeten it, to arrest decomposition, to stay corruption, to give flavour to its insipidity, and to save it from falling to pieces of its own wickedness. Ye are the salt of the earth.'

Now, it is not merely because we are the bearers of a truth that will do all this that we are thus spoken of, but we Christian men are to do it by the influence of conduct and character.

There are two or three thoughts suggested by this metaphor. The chief one is that of our power, and therefore our obligation to arrest the corruption

the example of Christian men... ought to tempt forth all that is best and purest and highest in the people with whom they come in contact

round us, by our own purity. The presence of a good man, according to the old superstition, prevented the possessed from playing their tricks. The presence of a good man hinders the devil from having elbow room to do his work. Do you and I exercise a repressive influence, (if we do not do anything better,) so that evil and low-toned life is ashamed to show itself in our presence and skulks back as do wrongdoers from the bull's-eye of a policeman's lantern. It is not a high function, but it is a very necessary one, and it is one that all Christian men and women ought to discharge – rebuking and hindering the operation of corruption, even if they have not the power to breathe a better spirit into the dead mass.

But the example of Christian men is not only repressive. It ought to tempt forth all that is best and purest and highest in the people with whom they come in contact. Every man that does right helps to make public opinion in favour of doing right; and every man that lowers the standard of morality in his own life helps to lower it in the community of which he is a part. And so in a thousand ways that I have no time to dwell upon here the men that have Christ in their hearts and something of Christ's conduct and character repeated in theirs are to be the preserving and purifying influence in the midst of this corrupt world.

There are two other points that I name, and do not enlarge upon. The first of them is – salt does its work by being brought into close contact with the thing which it is to work upon. And so we, brought into contact as we are with plenty of evil and wickedness by many common relations of friend-

ship, of kindred, of business, of proximity, of citizenship, and the like – we are not to seek to withdraw ourselves from contact with the evil. The only way by which the salt can purify is by being rubbed into the corrupted thing.

And once more, salt does its work silently, inconspicuously, gradually. 'Ye are the light of the world', says Christ in the next verse. Light is far-reaching and brilliant, flashing that it may be seen. That is one side of Christian work, the side that most of us like best, the conspicuous kind of work. Ay ! but there is a very much humbler, and, as I fancy, a very much more useful kind of work that we have all to do. We shall never be the 'light of the world', except on condition of being 'the salt of the earth'. You have to do the humble, inconspicuous, silent work of checking corruption by a pure example before you can aspire to do the other work of raying out light into the darkness, and so drawing men to Christ Himself.

Now, brethren, why do I say all these common, threadbare platitudes, as I know they are? Simply in order to plant upon them this one question to the heart and conscience of you Christian men and women – Is there anything in your life that makes this text, in its application to you, anything else than the bitterest mockery?

The grave possibility of the salt losing its savour

There is no need for asking the question whether that is a physical fact or not, whether in the natural realm it is possible for any forms of matter that have saline taste to lose it by any cause. That does not at all concern us. The point is that it is possible for us, who call ourselves – and are – Christians to lose our penetrating pungency, which stays corruption; to lose all that distinguishes us from the men that we are to better.

Now I think that nobody can look upon the present condition of professing Christendom; or, in a narrower aspect, upon the present condition of English Christianity; or in a still narrower, nobody can look round upon

this congregation; or in the narrowest view, none of us can look into our own hearts without feeling that this saying comes perilously near being true of us. And I beg you, dear Christian friends, while I try to dwell on this point to ask yourselves this question, 'Lord, is it I?' and not to be thinking of other people whom you may suppose the cap will fit.

There is, then, manifest on every side – first of all the obliteration of the distinction between the salt and the mass into which is inserted, or to put it into other words, Christian men and women swallow down bodily, and practise thoroughly, the maxims of the world, as to life, and what is pleasant, and what is desirable, and as to the application of morality to business. There is not a hair of difference in that respect between hundreds and thousands of professing Christian men, and the irreligious man that has his office up the same staircase. I know, of course, that there are in every communion saintly men and women who are labouring to keep themselves unspotted from the world, but I know too that in every communion there are those whose religion has next to no influence on their general conduct, and does not even keep them from corruption, to say nothing of making them sources of purifying influence. You cannot lay the flattering unction to your souls that the reason why there is so little difference between the Church and the world today is because the world has got so much better. I know that to a large extent the principles of Christian ethics have permeated the consciousness of a country like this, and have found their way even amongst people that make no profession of being Christians at all. Thank God for it; but that does not explain it all.

If you take a red-hot ball out of a furnace and lay it down upon a frosty moor, two processes will go on – the ball will lose its heat and the surrounding atmosphere will gain. There are two ways by which you equalise the temperature of a hotter and a colder body, the one is by the hot one getting cold, and the other is by the cold one

getting hot. If you are not warming the world, the world is freezing you. Every man influences all round about him, and receives influences from them, and if there be not more exports than imports, if there be not more influences and mightier influences raying out from him than coming into him, he is a poor creature, and at the mercy of circumstances. 'Men must either be hammers or anvils' – must either give blows or receive them. I am afraid that a great many of us who call ourselves Christians get a great deal more harm from the world than we ever dream of doing good to it. Remember this, 'You are the salt of the earth', and if you do not salt the world, the world will rot you.

Is there any difference between your ideal of happiness and the irreligious one? Is there any difference between your notion of what is pleasure, and the irreligious one? Is there any difference in your application of the rules of morality to daily life, any difference in your general way of looking at things from the way of the ungodly world? Yes, or No? Is the salt being infected by the carcase, or is it purifying the corruption? Answer the question, brother, as before God and your own conscience.

Then there is another thing. There can be no doubt but that all round and shared by us there are instances of the cooling of the fervour of Christian devotion. That is the reason for the small distinction in character and conduct between the world and the Church today. An Arctic climate will not grow tropical fruits, and if the heat has been let down, as it has been let down, you cannot expect the glories of character and the pure unworldliness of conduct that you would have had at a higher temperature. Nor is there any doubt but that the present temperature is, with some of us, a distinct loss of heat. It was not always so low. The thermometer has gone down.

You are the salt of the earth, and if you do not salt the world, the world will rot you

There are, no doubt, people listening to me who had once a far more vigorous Christian life than they have today; who were once far more aflame with the love of God than they are now. And although I know, of course, that as years go on emotion will become less vivid, and feeling may give place to principle, yet I know no reason why, as years go on, fervour should become less, or the warmth of our love to our Master should decline. There will be less sputtering and crackling when the fire burns up; there may be fewer flames; but there will be a hotter glow of ruddy unflaming heat. That is what ought to be in our Christian experience.

Nor can there be any doubt, I think, but that the obliteration of the distinction between us and the world, and the decay of the fervour of devotion which leads to it, are both to be traced to a yet deeper cause, and that is the loss or diminution of actual fellowship with Jesus Christ. It was that which made these men 'salt'. It was that which made them 'light'. It is that, and that alone, which makes devotion burn fervid, and which makes characters glow with the strange saintliness that rebukes iniquity, and works for the purifying of the world.

And so I would remind you that fellowship with Jesus Christ is no vague exercise of the mind but is to be cultivated by three things, which I fear we are becoming less and less habitual amongst professing Christians – meditation, the study of the Bible, private prayer. If you have not these – and you know best whether you have them or not – no power in Heaven or earth can prevent you from losing the savour that makes you salt.

Is there a possibility of re-salting the saltless salt, of restoring the lost savour?

'Wherewithall shall it be salted?' says the Master. That is plain enough, but

do not let us push it too far. If the Church is meant for the purifying of the world and the Church itself needs purifying, is there anything in the world that will do it? If the army joins the rebels is there anything that will bring back the army to submission? Our Lord is speaking about ordinary means and agencies. He is saying in effect, if the one thing that is intended to preserve the meat loses its power, is there anything lying about that will salt that? So far, then, the answer seems to be – No!

But Christ has no intention that these words should be pushed to this extreme, that if salt loses its savour, if a man loses the pungency of his Christian life, he cannot get it back, by going again to the source from which he got it at first. There is no such implication in these last words. There is no obstacle in the way of a penitent returning to the fountain of all power and purity, nor of the full restoration of the lost savour, if a man will only bring about a full reunion of himself with the source of the savour.

Dear brethren! The message is to each of us – the same pleading words, which the Apocalyptic seer heard from Heaven – come to you and me: 'Remember, therefore, from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works'. And all the savour and the sweetness that flow from fellowship with Jesus Christ will come back to us in larger measure than ever, if we will return unto the Lord. Repentance and returning will bring back the saltiness to the salt, and the brilliancy to the light.

But what is the certain end of the saltless salt

As the other Evangelist puts it: 'It is neither good for the land nor for the dunghill'.

You cannot put it upon the soil; there is no fertilizing virtue in it. You cannot even fling it into the rubbish heap; it will do mischief there. Pitch it out into the road; it will stop a cranny somewhere between the stones when

If it has failed in doing the only thing it was created for, it has failed altogether

once it is well trodden down by men's heels. That is all it is fit for. God has no use for it, man has no use for it. If it has failed in doing the only thing it was created for, it has failed altogether. Like a knife that will not cut, or a lamp that will not burn, it may have a beautiful handle, a beautiful stem, it may be highly artistic and decorated; does it cut, does it burn? If not, it is a failure altogether, and in this world there is no room for failures. The poorest living thing of the lowest type will jostle the dead thing out of the way. And so, for the salt that has lost its savour, there is only one thing to be done with it – cast it out, and tread it under foot.

Yes ! Where are the Churches of Asia Minor, the patriarchates of Alexandria, of Antioch, of Constantinople; the whole of that early Syrian, Palestinian Christianity; where are they? Where is the Church of North Africa, the Church of Augustine? 'Trodden under foot of men!' Over the archway of a mosque in Damascus you can read the half obliterated inscription – 'Thy Kingdom, O Christ, is an everlasting

Kingdom'. And above it – 'There is no God but God, and Mohammed is His prophet!' The salt has lost his savour, and been cast out.

And does anybody believe that the Churches of Christendom are eternal in their present shape? I see everywhere the signs of disintegration in the existing embodiments and organisations that set forth Christian life. And I am sure of this, that in the days that are coming to us the storm in which we are already caught, all dead branches will be whirled out of the tree. So much the better for the tree! And a great deal that calls itself organised Christianity will have to go down because there is not vitality enough in it to stand. For you know it is low vitality that catches all the diseases that are going; and it is out of the sick sheep's eyeholes that the ravens peck the eyes. And it will be the feeble types of spiritual life, the inconsistent Christianities of our churches, that will yield the crop of apostates and heretics and renegades, and that will fall before temptation.

Brethren, remember this: Unless you go back close to your Lord, you will go further away. The deadness will deepen, the coldness will become icier and icier; you will lose more and more of the life, and show less and less of the likeness, and purity, of Jesus Christ until you come to this – I pray God that none of us come to it – 'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead'. Dead!

My brother, let us return unto the Lord our God, and keep nearer Him than we ever have done, and bring our hearts more under the influence of His grace, and cultivate the habit of communion with Him; and pray and trust, and leave ourselves in His hands, that His power may come into us, and that we in the beauty of our characters, and the purity of our lives, and the elevation of our spirits, may witness to all men that we have been with Christ; and may, in some measure, check the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Kept and Keeping

A Study of Jude

Bob Fyall

A man went to an evening class to learn about precious stones. He was rather surprised when, on the first evening, all the teacher did was to hand out a tray of jade pieces and ask the class to study them. He became increasingly frustrated, however, as the same thing happened on the second and third week. On the fourth week he went home in disgust and said to his wife, 'That teacher does nothing but give us pieces of jade, and tonight he gave us a fake'. Unremitting exposure to the genuine had exposed the fake. In our Christian lives we need a similar exposure to the genuine gospel so that we can detect the many fakes on offer.

This study of Jude is the substance of two sermons preached recently in Holyrood Abbey Church, Edinburgh. Jude is a much-neglected letter and that neglect is deeply regrettable because of its vital message for today's church. Jude's passionate concern is that God's people contend for the faith

'that was once for all entrusted to the saints' (v.3). We can find much to help us in this short letter by asking five questions.

Who was he?

Verses 1 and 2 briefly introduce us to 'Jude' or 'Judas'. This was a common name in the first century but fell out of fashion because of Judas Iscariot. It has never really regained popularity; Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* is somewhat of an exception. He is the brother of James; probably the early Christian leader and author of the Letter; if so, he is also one of Jesus' four brothers (Matt. 13: 55; Mk. 6: 3). Yet he calls himself 'a servant of Jesus Christ'; his authority is not his physical relationship with Jesus but his calling and appointment by the Risen Lord.

This letter pulls no punches, but these early verses show his great pastoral concern as he speaks of the great

realities of the gospel in the lives of his readers. They have been called in the past, loved in the present and kept for the future. He wishes for them all the blessings of the grace of God in abundance?

Why did he write?

Jude says that he wanted to write about 'the salvation we share', probably something like Romans or Ephesians. However, the needs of time demanded a particular slant on that subject. So the letter is still about salvation ('God our Saviour' v.25) but from a particular angle. That angle is the need to contend for the true Apostolic gospel in a church where it was being increasingly denied. The faith is under attack from teachers whose teaching strikes both at the doctrines of the gospel and the life-style which flows from these.

'The faith' is not so much personal faith as the authoritative revelation which is non-negotiable and which

points to Christ the Lord and Saviour. To contend for the faith is not only the task of leaders; it is 'entrusted to the saints', to all of God's people. The word 'contend' has the nuance of athletic activity, like all those fit and healthy participants in the Olympic Games which were being screened at the time the sermons were preached. It includes public proclamation where the faith is shared and the name of Christ honoured.

What is the letter about?

In the main central section of the letter Jude gives us an anatomy of the false teacher so that we can recognise them and avoid the danger. This is not a historical curiosity. We are not going to meet a Valentinian or a Nicolaitan, to mention two types of false teacher around in the first century, but we are going to meet their modern equivalents. Jude's language is colourful and vivid; if he were an artist he would be Van Gogh. But such language is needed because it is often easy to wonder what all the fuss is about. Surely one of the devil's devices is to have error taught by charming people, and if he can try to ensure that truth is taught by angular and difficult people, he is doubly pleased. False teachers do not wear t-shirts saying 'I am a wolf' and we need to be alert. Jude is to show us that this is an age-old problem as he ranges wisely through the Old Testament. This is important. We need to know our Bibles so that we can distinguish the genuine from the fake. Moreover, this strong language is not personal but is a deep concern for the honour of Christ and the gospel. The false teachers, says Jude, have a number of characteristics.

They are marked by unbelief

All these examples are of those who think they know better than God. Israel in the desert, with their continual whinging, were in effect repudiating the great Exodus event and saying God got it wrong. The angels who sinned

rebelled against their god-given place and followed their leader Satan in rebellion. (Study such passages as Genesis 6, Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28.) Sodom and Gomorrah show a blend of bad theology and godless lifestyle. Those who today speak for the pro-gay lobby are basically saying that the Spirit got it wrong in Scripture. Unbelief is never neutral; wrong thinking leads to ungodly living.

They have a disdain for the supernatural

Behind these curious verses lie the heretical teachers' disdain for the whole supernatural world. Jude quotes here from inter-testamental works such as 'The Assumption of Moses' and '1 Enoch' and uses these illustrations of the general principles he is making. The Devil, the Accuser, claims Moses as his own and Moses is defended by the Archangel Michael. Even Michael cannot himself banish the Accuser, only God himself can. The point is there is a real world beyond this one and we need to take it seriously. This is the worldview, which the false teachers reject. They claim to be intelligent and sophisticated, but see v. 10 - they think and behave like 'unreasoning animals'. They do not grasp the big picture of the gospel and thus increasingly live in a fantasy world.

Their teaching leads to barrenness and judgement

'Woe' (v. 11) is not just an exclamation of disapproval; it is a statement of the judgement of God and, as such, is the opposite of 'blessed'. Cain seems odd as an example of a false teacher, but he is seen as a prototype 'do gooder' who trusts in good works (Gen. 4). Balaam deliberately leads God's people astray (Num. 23 & 24). Korah (Num. 16) attacks the words of Moses which are the words of God.

What is the result? First, this kind of teaching leads to deadness and barrenness rather than growth. These

Surely one of the devil's devices is to have error taught by charming people, and if he can try to ensure that truth is taught by angular and difficult people, he is doubly pleased

teachers promise much but deliver nothing. 'Love feasts' may be the Lord's Supper, and such people turn these occasions into times of indulgence and greed where self-gratification reigns supreme and where 'the hungry sheep look up and are not fed'. Then follows a series of vivid pictures of phenomena which look effective for a time but soon die away. Clouds race across the sea as if full of rain; trees are full of leaves – all empty promise but no fruit; crashing waves deposit only flotsam and jetsam and shooting stars flare spectacularly but briefly. How different is the picture of the true teacher in Daniel 12: 3: 'Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever'. Such barrenness is seen all around as churches with such teaching empty and die.

Second, this kind of teaching leads to judgement (v. 15–16). Again Jude uses a non-biblical reference from 1 Enoch, but there are echoes of Deuteronomy 33: 2–4 'and Isaiah 66: 15–16. Jude here is emphasising the importance of the return of Christ. If Jesus is Lord then he is going to have the last word. This judgement will be comprehensive: notice the repetition of 'all' in v. 15. By contrast (v. 16) these false teachers denigrate others and boast about themselves. When Christ returns, they will be exposed for what they are.

How do we handle false teaching?

Jude, like a good doctor, has set out the disease and shown how deadly it is. Now he speaks about remedy in vv. 17–23. There is a balance here between 'keep yourselves' (v. 21) and at the end 'him who is able to keep' (v. 24). God is committed to his people and we need to be committed to him. One of the ways we know we are kept is because we are keeping the faith. So what resources do we have?

Jude says we build on **the foundation of the apostles** (vv. 17–19). In

'Remember' is used in its full Biblical sense, not simply meaning 'recall' but actively incorporating the teaching of the apostles into our thinking and living

the previous verses he has drawn on the authority of the Old Testament, now he adds to that the authority of the apostles. The church will not keep the faith unless it builds on strong Biblical foundations. 'Remember' is used in its full Biblical sense, not simply meaning 'recall' but actively incorporating the teaching of the apostles into our thinking and living. We live 'in the last times' which is the whole period between the comings of Christ and what is said here is for the whole time the church is on earth. Jude points out two dangers in particular.

First **there will be scoffers**. Both Old and New Testaments agree on this; see the many references in Proverbs and in eg. Psalm 1. There will always be those who sneer at the gospel. For example, a prominent modern theologian wrote about the second coming: 'an event which has not happened in two thousand years is a non-event; it is not going to happen'. Again (as in v. 4) Jude insists that wrong teaching leads to ungodly living. Mockery is one of the devil's most successful devices. The media regularly sneers at committed Christian living using such words as 'fundamentalist' and 'straight-laced'.

Secondly, **there will be divisiveness**. This is not in itself a proof of wrong teaching; truth divides as well. But what Jude is talking about here is not a division about the truth; this is divisiveness arising from desire to gratify selfishness – mere natural instincts'. The fundamental problem is that such teachers are not Christian at all – 'do not have the Spirit'.

Jude further says that as we contend for the faith **we have a number of tasks to do** (vv. 22–23). The foundations are secure, but we need to act and to carry out a number of activities as a church; these verbs are plural. Contending for the faith is not to be left to a few individuals.

There is **a building task** (v. 20) which is mutual and which is saturated with prayer. At the heart of all this is the indwelling Spirit, the guarantor of our faith and the hope of glory.

There is a **keeping task** (v. 21). God keeps us but we need positively to remain in his love and look eagerly towards eternal life. The word ‘mercy’ is significant; even the faithful only escape judgement by grace.

There is a **compassionate task** (v. 22). The church is not composed exclusively of the truly faithful and the completely heretical. There are many, especially but by no means exclusively, among the young whose faith is weak and confused, often as a result of false teaching. Likewise there are many ministries, which without being heretical are very weak. Many do not teach heresy because they do not teach anything. We need to be compassionate to those trapped by false teaching and rescue them from the danger and help them towards the truth.

How will it all end?

Jude’s message has been challenging and uncomfortable but he ends with a glorious doxology which draws together the emphases of the letter. The false teachers will not succeed; God’s purposes will be fulfilled and his people will reach glory.

God is able to keep (v. 24) and the reference is probably to Psalm 121: 3. In the context of Jude this probably refers not only to stumbling but to apostasy. As we read the letter we are very aware of the terrible danger of falling away and Jude assures us that our God is able to keep us faithful right up to the end.

He will present us; this is a word used of a sacrifice which is offered and accepted. ‘Without fault’ suggests that the grace of Christ and his work on the cross has been totally effective; one of the many things the false teachers deny.

The words **with great joy** suggest an atmosphere of party and celebration and give great incentive to keep going in difficult and dangerous times.

Read and study this little letter. It will warn you, challenge you, but most of all encourage you to keep on going.

Training

Robin Sydserff,

The Editor has invited me to reflect on the matter of training for ministry. This is a broad topic, inviting a wide variety of opinions, and in that regard, much of what I say here is based on personal reflection on my own experience of training for ministry within the Church of Scotland. My intention in this article is to set that experience against what Scripture offers as a 'model for ministry', in particular, the portrait of 'A Workman Approved by God' in 2 Timothy 2: 14-26. To what extent do present structures and programmes equip for the task those called by God to be pastors-teachers? Interrogating our practice against Scripture's priorities is always a fruitful approach toward better practice. One final caveat – while training for ministry is, and must be, on-going through a lifetime of service, my focus here is on those critical formative years.

Nurturing Succession: *Called and Sent*

This heading crystallises two thoughts. First, we need to be wary of a mindset that works exclusively on the basis that preaching will call out preachers. Now, of course, God does call as his Word is preached. Indeed, this was my own experience, as over a number of years God laid on my heart a burden to preach what I was hearing, focused by a number of specific messages which called out Christian workers. Biblically, however, this is complementary to what might be termed 'pastoral affirmation' – the identification within a Christian community of those whom God has gifted for ministry, as those called by God, for that ministry. This balanced approach ('called *and* sent') will mitigate against a situation, whereby individuals of a certain age and profile might feel pressurised to follow a particular path, to which they feel neither called nor gifted. Equally, there is that responsibility laid upon those charged with spiritual oversight in a fellowship, to ensure that individuals whom God *is* calling, both recognise *and* answer that call. This

for Ministry

Proclamation Trust, London

Biblical balance is clearly evident in Timothy's call to be a pastor-teacher. No doubt called by the Spirit anointed preaching he was privileged to hear, not least from his mentor and father in the faith, Paul, the young Timothy was, at the same time, nurtured, disciplined and *sent* by the Christian community.

Nurturing succession

This leads to my second point — *nurturing succession*. In all probability, 2 Timothy were the last words of the apostle Paul. Acutely aware that his time is short, Paul's priority is to disciple and charge Timothy in the matter of Gospel succession. This is instructive for us in a number of ways. Paul's priority challenges our priorities. How committed are we in our churches, and more widely as an evangelical community in Scotland, to disciplining those who will follow after us? From one who has benefited enormously from serving probation in a strong evangelical fellowship, I would encourage those of you with a wealth of experience to consider whether this

is a ministry you and your congregation might fruitfully exercise? In this regard, let me share one example of best practice, in terms of the spiritual nurture I was privileged to receive during my probationary period. Consistent with Church of Scotland recommendations for training, I had a congregational support group, whose ministry of support and encouragement developed into a weekly commitment to set aside time individually on a Saturday evening to pray for me. Their prayers focused on my preaching, based on detailed notes I provided identifying structure, themes and spiritual priorities, but also prayer for my personal holiness and humility as a pastor-teacher, serving the Word and the people. Their sacrificial investment in my formation has been of significant spiritual value.

Continuity and the sending church

The process of training for ministry is one of constant transition, from work to study, from one placement to the next. Moreover, within the Church of

Scotland, at least, the training programme will intentionally involve exposure across the breadth of the theological perspective. Throughout this process continuity is critical. Once again, we find our precedent in the continuity of Paul's pastoral concern for Timothy. It is not, I believe, stretching the point too far to see in this the continuity that is the role of the home or sending church. The first sermon I preached was in my home church. Throughout my training there was a continuity of pastoral support, disciplining and prayer and, as time permitted, opportunities to preach. Toward the end of my probationary period, before moving to London, I returned to my home church to preach. There is surely a Biblical rightness in all of this, and an invested benefit in those of us privileged to have received this kind of support that only time will reveal.

A Workman Approved by God

I turn now from these more general observations to address the specific

Throughout my training, there was a continuity of pastoral support, discipling and prayer and, as time permitted, opportunities to preach

question as to whether present structures and programmes equip those called of God to be pastor-teachers. In 2 Timothy 2: 14-26, Paul uses three metaphors to describe the Christian worker approved of God. First, in verses 14 through 19, there is the unashamed workman, who correctly handles the word of truth. The second picture, in verses 20 to 22, is of the pure vessel – the mark of holiness in the Christian's character. Finally, in verses 23 to 26, there is the Lord's servant, marked by humility and grace. I will offer some brief reflections on each of these, although concentrating more fully on the first.

Trained to handle the word of truth?

Paul instructs Timothy: 'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of Truth.'¹ Later in the letter, Paul amplifies this exhortation in two ways: first, by reminding Timothy of the authority and transforming power of Scripture ('All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.'²); and second, by charging Timothy to preach that Word ('In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word...'³). Tying these together, to handle correctly the Word of Truth necessitates both a thorough knowledge of the Word and the ability to preach that Word.

Existing practice: strengths and weaknesses

While there is a degree of variation across denominations, the typical training model is a combination of formal academic theological education, practical placement experience and a conference cycle. Within my own denomination the practical training has been excellent, involving two year long part-time placements, a full-time summer placement and a full-time fifteen month probationary period (both my full-time placements served within evangelical congregations).

The academic education, however, centred in the theological faculties of Scotland's four older Universities is, in my view, inadequate as a means of equipping those in training to handle the Word of Truth. There are a number of contributory factors. These are secular academic institutions, driven by funding issues based predominantly on research excellence. In such an environment teaching struggles to attain equal, let alone first, priority. Moreover, as a factor of 'academic standards', the route from ministry into the academy is more problematic, resulting in an inevitable 'detachment' between those teaching and the practice of ministry. From the student perspective, although numbers in training are increasing, in all our theological faculties ministry students represent (and will continue to do so) a minority. We can no longer expect classes / teaching to be tailored to ministry.

Perhaps of most concern, however, is the lack of priority given in core curriculum to handling Scripture and, in particular, to preaching. Useful as the academic environment might be for training the mind and for learning to defend one's theological position in what can be a hostile environment, it offers little in the core priority of handling the Word of Truth. Likewise, in the conference programme, we rarely (if ever) got to grips with what might be considered rigorous Biblical exposition. All of this stands in stark

contrast to Paul's injunction that we must be 'thoroughly equipped' for service.

Pragmatic or visionary solutions?

The issues identified above are not new, of course, although my suspicion is that the trend is a shift further from, rather than closer to, these priorities. The situation, however, is arguably all the more critical today, in that the times in which we live demand a great deal of the preacher. To minister into the hostile missional context of a society gripped by secularism necessitates both an evangelistic and an apologetic dimension to our preaching, as we seek to articulate God's Living Word at the interface of secular culture. We are not equipped for such a task by default. Pursuing excellence in handling God's Word requires excellence in practical theological education.

Let me offer two approaches by way of response to the issues identified here: pragmatism and vision. A pragmatic approach makes out the best we can, seeking to compensate here and there for evident weaknesses. Personally, I took the decision at the start of my training to preach weekly, so that I might be handling the Word, however inadequately, on a systematic basis. In addition to a full programme of pulpit-supply, I was fortunate in that both my full-time placements afforded the opportunity for weekly preaching. This, however, would be the exception rather than the norm and cannot be assumed. In addition, like many colleagues, I augmented my training by attending a number of ministry conferences within the wider evangelical community.

My intention in subsuming all of this as 'pragmatism' is in no way to belittle the value of each of the constituent factors. All I am saying is that these are ways of compensating for a problem, rather than tackling the problem itself.

like many colleagues, I augmented my training by attending a number of ministry conferences within the wider evangelical community

Toward vision

The report of the Board of Ministry at the 2004 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland is to be welcomed as a first step toward the possibility of recognising 'other institutions' (either in Scotland, or beyond), 'as part of the integrated and concurrent process of formation for ministry...'⁴ The two institutions mentioned specifically in the report are the Highland Theological College and the International Christian College. While these are only tentative first steps, with many matters as yet unresolved (the report to the 2004 Assembly was an interim report, with a final report to be presented in 2005), the proposals are to be welcomed and merit the support of the wider evangelical community.

An equally plausible (and complementary) approach would be the provision of practical theological education through the non-accredited route. The addition of one or two years to the process of an individual's formation for ministry would be more than compensated for in the provision of core teaching in handling God's Word, provided in a self-determining evangelical environment. These possibilities constitute a clear shift from pragmatism to vision.

Trained in holiness and humility?

In conclusion I would like to offer some brief reflections on Paul's second and third metaphors. Space does not permit detailed discussion here. In verses 20 to 22 of chapter 2, the image is of the pure vessel, representative of the mark of holiness in Christian character. I welcome the recent resurgence of interest in the writings and ministry

of Robert Murray McCheyne.⁵ In one of his letters, dated 2 October, 1840, McCheyne wrote these words: 'Remember you are God's sword, His instrument – I trust a chosen vessel unto Him to bear His name. In great measure, according to the purity and perfections of the instrument, will be the success. It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hands of God.'⁶ We are privileged to be pastor-teachers to real people, whom we must love as we divide the Word of Truth amongst them. This conjunction of truth and love is central to the Biblical portrait of Christian ministry. Writing on the subject of preaching to real people, Martin Allen concludes with these words of Richard Baxter: 'The whole course of our ministry must be carried on in tender love to our people... Let them see that you are willing to spend and be spent for their sakes...'⁷ In Paul's third metaphor in verses 23 to 26, the picture is of the Lord's servant, marked by humility and grace, a reminder that our calling is to love and serve the Master Jesus.

I lay down these markers simply as reminders that they are integral to formation and training for ministry. There is a danger that, in our quest for excellence in handling God's Word, we forget that we are not only servants of the Word of Truth, but servants of our people, and above all else, servants of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹ 2 Timothy 2:15

² 2 Timothy 3:16-17

³ 2 Timothy 4:1-2a

⁴ The Church of Scotland, *Reports to the General Assembly 2004*, section 5.7.1

⁵ I have in mind here two recently published biographies: L.J. Van Valen, *Constrained by His Love: A New Biography on Robert Murray McCheyne* (Christian Focus Publications, 2002) and David J. Robertson, *Robert Murray McCheyne* (Paternoster Press, 2003)

⁶ Andrew Bonar, *Memoirs and Remains of R.M. McCheyne* (The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966 edition), p.282

⁷ Martin Allen, *Preaching to Real People*, in W. Philip (Ed.), *The Practical Preacher* (Proclamation Trust Media & Christian Focus Publications, 2002), p. 88



Ann Allen Meets William Philip

We can ill afford to lose people out of the church in Scotland so it was a particular joy to welcome back from five years' voluntary exile in England, Willie Philip, who recently was inducted to the Charge of St George's-Tron Church in Glasgow. In these first weeks of settling in I was given an opportunity to meet with him and find out what he dreams of for the future and what he has learned from the past.

Ann: Willie, you must be one of few people who have followed in the footsteps of both parents, following 2 careers first in medicine then in ministry. How did ministry win out?

Willie: I really loved medicine but in my student years in Aberdeen, under the ministry in Gilcomston, I became

more and more convinced that I wanted to be involved in preaching and teaching. Initially I thought that might mean medical missionary work. However my inner conviction towards ministry grew and that was confirmed by others in and outside the church. I remember hearing Mr Still preach week by week and thinking there is nothing more valuable in the world than to be involved in ministry like this.

Ann: You are in a unique position as the son of James Philip of Holyrood Abbey to comment on the contribution he and others in his generation made to the church in Scotland.

Willie: I believe one of the greatest priorities we have is the preservation and passing on of the gospel to the next generation. 2 Tim. 2 ... and that means that there is a huge incentive to train future leaders. That was happening all the time in Gilcomston,

Holyrood, Sandyford. They were unique ministries where a central purpose of the congregation was to be a kind of incubator for future leaders. The congregations saw their role as being an engine room of prayer, of providing hospitality and of nurturing young people so that naturally, without any schemes or structures, people were disciplined and drawn to leadership roles in ministry. In their day, these men were radicals. For William Still to say in the 1970's, 'We are ripping out the pews and we will have a band in the hall to attract young people in', that was way ahead of the times. They did not have a preservation mentality but they pushed the boundaries and there was natural flow of candidates for ministry and mission fields from these congregations.

They combined total confidence in the scriptures with radical approaches to ministry. When my Dad came to Holyrood in the 1960's there were 150 charges in Edinburgh and he was the only evangelical. Odds of 150 : 1 seem

huge but there was a critical mass of young people who came to Holyrood and were nurtured in these days. Many found their way into ministry of one kind or another. Now there are 100 charges in Edinburgh and perhaps 30 of them are evangelical. Odds of 100:30 would seem much better for the spread of the gospel, but do any of these 30 congregations today have that critical mass of students and young people in their 20's and 30's who are being sent out and prepared for ministry? I don't think so. That ingrained vision of preparing and sending out into ministry seems to have been lost. We have a culture now where ministry is not valued and in Gilcomston and these central congregations it was hugely valued. People are making the mistake of asking 'Where is the new Willie Still?'. There is never going to be another W.S. That unique generation have played their part. The next generation needs to meet the needs of today's church in contemporary, relevant and dynamic ways.

Ann: So coming back to Scotland from the heart of London, and assessing the Church of Scotland as opposed to the Church in Scotland what do you see?

Willie: Well, frankly it is hard not to be deeply depressed and pessimistic about the state of the C of S. All the time I've been away I've received and read the *Ministers Forum*, the in-house news letter. Everyone in ministry it seems, not just evangelicals, is concerned about the shrinkage of the Kirk as opposed to the increasing centralisation and growth of bureaucracy which is sucking so much finance and energy away from the local congregations.

From my limited observation students, by and large, have abandoned the church of Scotland and choose elsewhere to worship. That may reap benefits for independent and other churches but it bodes ill for the Kirk. Unless there is radical shake up and change I am very pessimistic about the survival of the denomination. For example at the recent SMA conference

when 500 or so people attended, a very small proportion were C of S ministers, less than 80 in fact. Now if people are looking for opportunities for ministry what would attract them to a cumbersome and apparently dying institution? Unless you have some denominational loyalty and have been nurtured and fed within the institution you are not likely to be drawn into it from the outside. I am the last minister to come into Glasgow Presbytery who has no limit on tenure. Lack of tenure will be a huge disincentive and few advantages remain for those considering ministry. The attractions of independent ministry far outweigh those of the kirk. Plant a church with 30 or so dynamic young people and the possibilities of growth are there without any of the inhibitions of a strangling institution. However for many people established churches are still the way in and we have to do both, innovate and keep doing the tried and tested things.

As I look around I fear that many folk are in preservation mode in ministry, being faithful, but not seeing much happen, and others who are seeking more radical approaches are losing confidence in the Scriptures' power and deserting a biblical ministry.

Ann: Yet here you are Willie, just starting out your ministry within that same depressed institution. Why come?

Willie: I do have hope. There is still time. I did once wonder if it were in fact possible to have a strongly conservative, confessionally committed, expanding, mission-oriented church, but now I know it is. It's possible for I see that across the Atlantic in the PCA. Tim Keller has said that in a situation of decline the worst system to be part of is Presbyterianism but in a time of growth and expansion Presbyterianism is the best there is. The PCA has systems which are far less stifling than ours. Theirs is a less centralised form of presbyterianism and they are enjoying life and growth. Philip Jensen delivered a seminal address some years ago at the

Proclamation Trust that delivered a kick in the pants to anglicans. He urged them to be willing if necessary to go against the denomination and set free a generation to make changes rather than moan about what needed changed. So it can be done, and, while I feel time is running out for us in Scotland, it is not yet too late. We need to seize the day.

Ann: You've spent 5 years in the work of the Proclamation Trust centred in London. What was your specific role there and what do you bring to ministry from that wide and varied experience?

Willie: Proclamation Trust was founded in 1986 to mark 25 years of the ministry of Dick Lucas at St Helens. It has several arms. The Evangelical Ministry Assembly (EMA), which is the largest and best known conference, was established in 1984 and every year I had responsibility for organising that. But even more important I think are the various residential ministers' preaching conferences. Many ministers would say that these conference are their lifeline, reinforcing their primary calling to deal worthily with the word of God and preach and teach it. Along with EMA they serve to focus evangelicals on expounding scripture as the foundational task of ministry, to deal with the bible so that the text speaks in its own terms, in its own context so that people hear the Bible speaking to them, and read it for themselves and pass on their understanding to others. People look to the Proclamation Trust to set a standard in the rigour with which they deal with biblical text.

Then Cornhill – this was set up in 1991 as a training school in response to the lamentable denominational training for ministry, with David Jackman as its director. There are no exams and no academic qualifications at the end. Its aim is to teach people over one year how to use the bible, how to present material, how to preach and communicate. It is training in accessible format, rigorous but not overly aca-

demic. 100 people each year come through the scheme and many find their way into full-time ministries or return to make a much greater contribution as lay people in their work and congregations.

Third is PT media which extends the reach of PT's ministry through audio recordings and audio / visual materials and more recently books. This is a very important part of the work greatly appreciated by folk in countries all over the world. I learned an enormous amount at PT and had a unique opportunity of seeing at first-hand an incredible variety of ministry both there and overseas in Australasia and America. I was exposed to the very best of preaching and teaching that there is today. I'd like to think I can harvest lessons from all that for the good of the church here in Scotland.

Ann: Are there lessons to be learned, both positive and negative from the Anglican situation?

Willie: I would say that the Evangelical Anglicans have a better understanding of Church in that they focus on their local situation much more than we do. They see the denomination is there to serve them locally; they enjoy much more financial independence and it seems to be easier to get the local Bishop to give assent for an initiative than it is to influence a whole presbytery! In many places down south young men are very radical in their approach to ministry yet hold that in tension with a *Word* ministry, and I think we can learn a lot from that.

They have a high view of women's ministry, endorsing their gifts and using them in a team setting, while holding clear principles of headship and complementary roles. There are few growing churches where there is not a strong team ministry. It is very much the pattern. I was able to throw myself 100% into the ministry of Proclamation Trust because I was promoting other people's ministry and not my own. It was a great protection against any kind of self aggrandisement. I would be very nervous of any kind of Empire building

because I have seen the negative results of that in some situations in the south. I've also learned that there is only so much one person can do. One can have great vision and a desire to see many things change and come about, but there needs to be a prioritising.

Ann: So given a blank sheet – what would your dreams be?

Willie: I can't use my position in the church as a springboard for other ministries. In that way lies disaster, as I've seen in other places. So for the other dreams the Lord will have to raise up some other people. That was the pattern that Dick Lucas adopted at St Helens, where other people led the other areas of work which developed in central London.

However there is hardly any opportunity in Scotland for people to learn how to handle God's word. We have a candidate in the Tron who has just finished his first year of training for the C of S ministry. In this past year he has preached just 3 times. How ridiculous is that in the scheme of training and of course the Tron pulpit is hardly the place to start to learn how to preach. How do guys like him get properly trained? So in the future I would hope and pray that a Cornhill-type of course might be set up in Scotland, and a training initiative be at the heart of Scotland, providing training in a wide variety of format, not restricted to pulpit preaching, so that the people of God are equipped to use and handle the word of God and have great confidence in doing so. Churches like the Tron would, I hope, want to throw their support right behind any such initiatives. I think it is a realisable dream – time will tell.

Ann: The Tron is unique in Scotland in that it is bang in the heart of our largest city and that it has a thriving congregation of around 500 plus many adherents. You were raised in a gathered congregation, nurtured in one and now have returned to minister in one. How would you counter those who say

the days of city-centre gathered congregations are numbered?

Willie: I'd quote Tim Keller who has had a remarkable ministry in the Church of the Redeemer in New York. He says this, 'If the country churches are Christian and the cities are pagan then the country as a whole is moving in a pagan direction, but if the cities are Christian, even if the countryside areas are pagan, then the culture as a whole is moving in a Christian direction'.

Urban centres are critical to the gospel. We see that in the Acts of the Apostles. The cities are by and large where the opinion formers are and where the future leaders are gathered for training. The cities are generally where the visionaries and the trendsetters emerge. If I had a blank piece of paper and wanted to influence Scotland with the gospel I would see as an integral part of that plan bible preaching ministries in key centres of student population and would pour resources into these centres. That's not to belittle what happens elsewhere but I have seen this work to great effect in England and I think it is complete justification for the kind of ministry I have inherited here.

Ann: So in these tentative first months how would you see your ministry priorities here in Glasgow?

Willie: My job is to lead and pastor this congregation, believing that through the ministry of the Word people will emerge as future leaders and preachers and evangelists. I'll maybe feel comfortable preaching here in about 30 years time! It is a challenge! Over half the congregation in the Tron are retired people. The other 50% are added to by a large number of students. I think we need to rattle the cage here in Scotland and be very proactive in getting people into ministry. That means identifying those who have gifts and helping them into training to develop those gifts. That could be encouraging folk in my congregation to share the

gospel over a cup of tea with neighbours, or in witnessing at the workplace, or in developing gifts for full-time ministry of various kinds. I'd like to see a stream of people discovering and honing their skills for the gospel and the church. To do that we would need a strong team and I'm delighted with those here already working with young people, children, and engaged in street evangelism. We don't have a clearly defined student ministry as yet, and developing that would have to be one of my first priorities. God in his providence has brought me here and I hope to be able to combine radical approaches to ministry with complete biblical faithfulness. I've seen that work powerfully elsewhere and I believe that that combination can yet reach Scotland.

Ann: The ministry at the Tron has been immensely valued by many over the years and we eagerly anticipate that God will do something new and inspiring as this new chapter, with a new leader, begins.

Can we believe Genesis today?

Ernest Lucas

IVP, Leicester, 2nd Ed, 2001. 192pp.
£6.99

ISBN 0 85111 658 2

Anyone engaging in personal evangelism or public proclamation of the gospel will sooner or later run into the objection that 'science has explained away God'. With or without scientific training, a reader of this book would find great help in preparing for such challenges. It could also be passed to an interested enquirer for whom Genesis was an issue, and there are helpful suggestions for further reading at the end of each chapter.

Lucas has a background in biochemical research as well as biblical studies, and he writes in a scientifically literate though non-technical style. He wisely begins with a chapter on approaching truth, with the Christian roots of science duly highlighted. There follows a focus on both the usefulness of the scientific method and its inherent limitations, an important corrective in today's culture where scientists are often given (or assume) the role of infallible priesthood in the matter of origins. Chapter 3 on biblical interpretation is thorough but accessible, with several approving citations of Calvin on Genesis.

These introductory chapters lead to separate discussions of 'literal' and 'other' approaches to beginnings. The author clearly plumps for theistic evolution (despite its scientific as well as theological problems!), but he is generally fair to all points of view. This is a great strength of the book. It counters the tendency for evangelical opinion on origins to be polarised, with awareness of competing views often being based on caricature rather than knowledge.

The only all-new chapter from the first (1989) edition is entitled 'Creation, chaos and design.' On the first two topics Lucas writes helpfully, but the section on design is disappointing. The major challenge to Darwinism from *Intelligent Design*, associated with Berkeley's Phillip Johnson and others, is emphatically *not* a case of 'God of the

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gaps' (contra p.124). And Johnson's own writings show that he most certainly *does* understand the relevant metaphysical and methodological issues (contra p.126)!

But despite this shortcoming, the updating in the other chapters in the fast-developing field of origins would make this book a worthwhile purchase even for someone who had the earlier edition.

Alistair Donald, New Deer

Grace Keeps You Going

Mac N. and Anne Shaw Turnage
Westminster John Knox Press,
Louisville-London, 2001. 136pp.

£7.99

ISBN 0 664 22567 5

The subtitle for this book is *Spiritual Wisdom from Cancer Survivors*. The term *survivors* throughout the book is preferred to *victims*. The book is a collection of short accounts of the cancer experiences of a variety of survivors, some Christians, some not. These accounts are interspersed with appropriate poems, presumably written by the authors, and each chapter summarises what has been learned as a result of cancer.

The authors set up a help group *CanCare* in several of the States of America. Those who have survived cancer are recruited and trained to help others going through cancer. This book could be part of a manual for *CanCare* volunteers.

If you are looking for a *theological treatise* dealing with the issue of sickness or terminal illness, then this is not the book for you. There is surprisingly little Scripture in this little volume, even though some of the survivors are believers. Neither will you find closely argued theological reasons for the problem of suffering.

What you will find, however, are some very honest accounts of what accompanies cancer in the lives of survivors and their families and associates. If you are not a cancer survivor

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you are unlikely understand or even to believe some of the side effects of this disease – physical, emotional, spiritual and even social effects. There will be elements here with which every cancer survivor will identify. To that extent it will help some people to realise that they are not alone; that others have gone down the same road.

Is this a book to give to someone who has been diagnosed with cancer? Yes and No. It *will* help them understand some of the things that are happening to them. It *will not* point them to Jesus Christ as the only answer. It could be quite a disturbing book, but maybe we *need* to be disturbed to enter the world of the cancer survivor.

Hugh Watt, Drumnadrochit

The God of Miracles: An Exegetical Examination of God's Action in the World

C. John Collins

Apollos, Leicester, 2001. 224pp. £11.99

ISBN 0 85111 477 6

How is God's activity in the world to be understood? In what way is God's activity in natural events different from his activity in supernatural events? Collins seeks to give specific answers to these questions.

The author begins by presenting three positions in the controversy. Both Providentialism and Occasionalism perceive natural and supernatural events along a continuum of God's activity in the world, each beginning at the opposite pole. Providentialism begins with nature and views miracles as events that follow natural laws that are not yet understood; thus, miracles are ultimately explicable by scientific study. Occasionalism begins with the supernatural and views naturally occurring events as God's standard practice in the world. In this view natural 'laws' are merely human attempts to codify God's typical pattern of activity; direct supernatural causa-

tion actually determines everything that happens. Against both of these views Supernaturalism denies that natural and supernatural activity can, be understood as continuous. It claims that, whereas naturally occurring events are controlled by the principle of cause and effect inherent in the physical world, supernaturally occurring events are immediate divine interventions completely outside this natural principle. Collins is quick to point out that according to Supernaturalism the principle of cause and effect inherent in the natural world is designed by God and, therefore, not something outside God's activity; the doctrine of concurrence states that God is an active participant in all these events through His ordinary providence.

Collins asks (pp. 16-17), 'Does the biblical material actually favour one of the models for God's relationship with the created realm over another (perhaps with refinements)?' He believes an exegetical study of the biblical passages provides a resounding, 'Yes!' and his aim is to demonstrate that Supernaturalism is the only biblically warranted view. I have some reservations, however.

First, Collins' strict separation of the three positions does not represent the controversy accurately, for it is not uncommon to find one person advocating more than one of these views. Such persons typically view the options as three different but valid *perspectives* by which one can view God's activity in the world. Second, I am not convinced that the biblical writers / texts unanimously support the Supernaturalist view. Despite these reservations, however, the book is thought provoking and a worthy contribution to the continuing 'science-religion' controversy.

Robert Keay, St Andrews

Watching What We Watch: Prime-Time Television through the Lens of Faith.

Walter T. Davis Jr., Teresa Blythe, Gary Dreibelbis, Mark Scalese SJ,

Elizabeth Winans Winslea, Donald L. Ashburn.

Geneva Press, Louisville, 2001. xxii and 338pp. £15.99

ISBN 0-664-50193-1

This book is based on the premise that television broadcasting provides all the elements that are needed to make up a religion. As Christians, therefore, we should be looking at TV programmes through the lens of *our* faith, first, to inquire of them what their beliefs and values are, and, second, to engage with them within the context of our communication of the gospel. It is worth quoting a paragraph from the Introduction in full to get an insight to the thinking of the authors, most of whom are Presbyterians associated with San Francisco Theological Seminary.

'A religion consists of four elements: a worldview composed of a web of mutually reinforcing beliefs and values; a moral code; periodic public rituals; and a community of believers who practice these rituals. Television provides all four. As our national storyteller, television shows us what the world is like and what our place in it is. Artists, actors, and anchors have replaced religious leaders and public officials as the predominant creators of meaning in American society.' (p.xii) TV, like the Bible, gives to us beliefs and values couched in story; these beliefs and values do not confront us head on but, through stories that engage our interest, subvert our thinking and acting. The subversion, of course, is not all in the minds of Christians. There are 'moments of grace' which subvert those of hard heart.

A number of programme genres are considered: sitcoms, dramas, news / sport, and commercials. That the book relates to American TV should not concern us for so many of the programmes considered are already showing on European TV through both terrestrial and satellite / cable channels. Some of them, such as *ER*, *The Simpsons* and *Will and Grace* are prime-time compulsory viewing for many people.

As the father of two young children, I am concerned about the beliefs and values that enter their minds through

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TV. As a minister, I am concerned that Christians are able to think critically about the culture in which we live, not only so that we are not subverted in our thinking, but also so that we have the tools to communicate the gospel with the people of our times. Though we may not accept every analysis presented by the authors here, they give us tools and the impetus to do the work for ourselves and become more aware of the sub-texts of TV programmes. For this they must be thanked.

The project's website address is www.lensofffaith.org where more details of the book and the authors can be found.

Jared Hay, Balerno

Faith Works: Lessons on Spirituality and Social Action

Jim Wallis

SPCK, London, 2002. 196pp. £12.99
ISBN 0 281 055254

Named by *Time* magazine as one of the '50 faces for America's future', Jim Wallis, leading social activist, spokesperson and writer, brings to us in *Faith Works* a wonderful book which with both substance and passion is at once deeply spiritual and deeply human.

Wallis invites us to get close; to get close to the heart of God who reminds us in Isaiah 58 'that our own fulfilment in life is bound up with our neighbour's well-being'; to get close to his life and all that sustains his compassionate concern for poor people and his prophetic determination to stand alongside them in acting and speaking for justice; to get close to his family knowing God's grace both in birth and bereavement; to get close to his friends, gang leaders, archbishops, presidents and students from America and across the world who exemplify faith in action.

The light touch of chapter headings such as: 'Trust Your Questions', 'Get Out of the House More Often', and 'Have a dream', belies the profound thinking and extensive hands on experience

which Wallis brings to us as he exhorts us to stand up for what we believe and shows us how our beliefs can be put into action.

Wallis challenges those of us who deny or ignore poverty to recognise that it has three faces: material, civic and spiritual, 'recognising all three poverties and their relatedness is the key to overcoming them'. He believes that, at this time, there is a new movement for change and that Christians with vision could and should lead that movement, 'generating a new expression of compassion and resolution on behalf of poor people that connects them to the rest of us'.

I am already telling my friends, church leaders and students to read this book. Wallis doesn't write many books but he writes them well and this is one of the best yet.

Graeme Clark, Scottish Baptist College

The Roots of Endurance – Invincible Perseverance in the lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon and William Wilberforce

John Piper

Inter Varsity Press, Leicester, 2002.
174pp. £7.99

ISBN 0 85111 2897

John Piper seeks in this book to examine the reasons for, or roots of, the endurance which kept Newton, Simeon and Wilberforce going as sane, balanced, happy Christians. There is an introduction on the Biblical roots of endurance, which makes some important observations, a chapter for each of the individuals named above and a conclusion on the value of History, where Piper points out that the subjects of the study did not have to suffer in the same sorts of ways that many Christians have had to. The book is non-technical and therefore quite accessible to the non-specialist. The warmth of Newton's pastoral concern, the quality of Simeon's devotional life and the practical outworkings of Wilberforce's faith stood out for the reviewer. Somewhat more difficult to trace or keep in view was the theme, namely, what the roots of their endurance were. There is, for example, a

considerable passage on Newton's tenderness and what the roots of that were, but this is a different, if related, subject; and elsewhere, Piper talks of the root of the root, the solid ground where the root was planted, in this case referring to the great doctrines of the Bible. The recurring ideas on the roots of endurance are: joy in God, and Christ Himself, crucified, risen and reigning, although other roots are mentioned, such as camaraderie. My main reservation about this book, apart from the very small print the footnotes are written in, is the difficulty in following the main theme, namely what the roots of endurance are. However, the focus on God, on Christ, and the inspiring look at these three lives, makes this book edifying and worthwhile.

Keith Cunningham, Edinburgh

Romans: An Exposition of Chapter 13 – Life in Two Kingdoms

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 2002. 323pp. £16.50

ISBN 0 85151 8249

This volume contains 23 addresses on Romans 13 preached at Westminster Chapel between November 1966 and May 1967. That tells us three significant things: this is not a commentary or a reference book (there is no index); it is not a book written by Lloyd Jones for publication; these addresses have been transcribed by others in order to make them available to the wider public; this is not 'the latest thing' – it is offered to us as a classic from the past, albeit the fairly recent past.

The first address looks at the chapter as a whole, and its place in Romans. The next 10 deal with the Christian view of civil government, and these were, for me, the highlight of the book – helpful and stimulating. The final twelve deal, broadly speaking, with the Christian life and eschatology.

The addresses are possibly more helpfully described as lectures than sermons. For example, there are three addresses on the history of Christian thinking on the relationship between

church and state, in which only passing reference is made to the text of Roman 13, and very little to any other part of the Bible. In fact, it would probably be more accurate to describe this as a collection of addresses *on issues raised by* Romans 13. Hence, since verses 11 and 12 allude to the return of Christ, there is an address on the Biblical teaching on this subject. Verses 12 and 13 mention 'us' (meaning Christians) a few times, so there is an address on the distinction between those who are converted and those who are not. The result is that a substantial number of topics are dealt with in the course of these pages. This is undoubtedly just what a congregation needs from the preacher, but it means that this book could just about be given the title *Addresses on Diverse Subjects*.

The content is solid, sound, balanced, and thoughtful. Many people would profit from reading this volume. But I must confess that I find difficulty thinking of a compelling reason why you should sell your shirt to get hold of it, unless you have an exceptional interest in either Lloyd Jones or Romans 13.

John Mann, Kinlochbervie

God and Cosmos – A Christian View of Time, Space and the Universe

John Byl

The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, 2001. 243 pp. £6.50
ISBN 0 85151 800 1

While much has been written by Christian writers on the subject of Evolution comparatively few have considered the science of Cosmology, a subject one step further back into the past and one step beyond the confines of our world to the structure and origins of the whole universe. In this book mathematician and astronomer John Byl provides us with a glimpse into this fascinating subject, showing that as Christians we need not feel intimidated.

Following an initial chapter dealing with the nature of scientific theorising, Byl leads us briefly through the history of Cosmology from the ancient Greeks

to the dominant cosmology of the present day, the Big Bang Theory. Cosmology is seen to be a branch of science in which, because it deals with processes so far removed from ourselves by both time and distance and such extreme conditions, much theorising tends to be highly speculative. Far from its media image of being virtually established fact, the Big Bang Theory is inherently untestable, extrapolates far beyond the observed data and has had to be modified numerous times on a seemingly *ad hoc* basis to overcome serious deficiencies.

The author then goes on to discuss the interaction of cosmology with Christianity. He shows how some Christians have sought to use Big-bang Cosmology to justify belief in God and warns that this is far too wobbly a foundation on which to build any such proof.

Finally Byl considers the interaction of biblical Christianity with Cosmology and various attempts to account for the apparent contradictions between Genesis 1-2 and the observations and theories of modern science. Byl insists on a very literal interpretation of Genesis, suggesting that the universe was created around 4000 bc, in what he calls a mature state, with light already en route from stars millions of light years away, giving the impression that the universe is much older than it is. Clearly, not all biblical Christians will accept this view. A little more interaction with evangelical scholars who are able to accept an old earth without jettisoning belief in the fall of Adam would have been helpful!

This book is highly recommended, if only as an antidote to those TV news programmes that delight to entertain us with sensationalistic, grossly over-simplified, and over-confident pieces on the latest 'discovery' of what happened within a few milliseconds of the Big Bang.

Although Byl manages to avoid all mathematical equations in his book, inevitably mathematical concepts do arise, and some knowledge of mathematics and physics, up to and beyond

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A-level standard, would be helpful to the reader.

The book concludes with an index and comprehensive bibliography.

*Robert Kane, Newtownstewart,
Co. Tyrone*

Preaching is Believing

Ronald J. Allen

Westminster John Knox Press, Kentucky, 2002. 162pp. £10.99
ISBN 0 664 22330 3

This book is a primer for preachers, written with the conviction that doctrine – systematic theology must be preached to be believed. He proceeds from the assertion that in much preaching there is a lack of a consistent and assertive theological message.

His theological self-definition is 'revisionary reformed' as a theologian open to revise his interpretation of the world and its potential from the perspective of Christian tradition and of that tradition revised by contemporary experience. He is a Professor of Preaching in a U.S. seminary.

Allen gives an overview in his opening chapters of why systematic theology must be more to the fore in the preparation and delivery of sermons. He then surveys how this is worked out in different preaching styles, whether topical, expository or lectionary based. Rather than being an advocate for any one style he says that preachers must call upon the rich resources available through systematic theology, for instance the historic creeds and confessions.

In a particularly helpful way he illustrates the isolationism of a textual approach to preaching which fails to be aware of the theological sweep of Scripture and of the broader perspective given by theology. Answering those who fear dull preaching, he gives some practical pointers for making theology lively in the sermon.

Helpfully he gives some sample sermons and breaks them down to illustrate his application and integration

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of systematic theology in preparation and delivery.

In an interesting appendix he gives a theological family tree showing relationships among contemporary and historic theological families.

I think this book would best serve its purpose as a primer to stimulate preachers to be more aware of the resources of systematic theology for biblical preaching.

Jim Reid, Kinghorn, Fife

A Royal 'Waste' of Time

Marva J. Dawn

Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999. 370pp. £11.99

ISBN 0 8028 4586 X

The Splendor of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World is the subtitle of this book which is a follow-up to *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*. It is a collection of essays, articles, sermons, some of which have appeared elsewhere. The book then has a variety to it, is intended to be one you can sample various parts. Each of the six parts on culture, the splendour of God, building community, forming character, choices we make in worship, and challenges we face – has an introductory section outlining what is coming in that particular part. In this way Dawn gives the book some cohesive shape and thrust, though it has the feel of a collection of papers, for example it is repetitive in places.

One of these repetitions is that Dawn frequently reminds us of what she considers to be the three main purposes of worship: to glorify God, to build community, to nurture character. These are consistently used as measuring sticks to guide discussion and decision on what we do, how we approach worship.

A main concern, and criticism of today's church, is that we should not seek to shape worship series in order to make it more attractive to people. Dawn cares passionately about evangelism but also about worship. And in

worship we are speaking to God, not to other people. Therefore the whole seeker sensitive movement is something she dislikes as is the practice of offering a variety of service formats to suit different tastes: that, she thinks, offends against building community. She believes that we should be able to rise above different preferences and tastes and establish worship format on basic and generally accepted principles. However on occasion she falls into the trap of not recognising that what she thinks are rights and wrongs really are a matter of personal preference. In pursuing the line she does she leaves herself open to the criticism of being elitist (she would strenuously deny that, and does give good examples of how she can be otherwise) and obscurantist. The latter point is hardly fair as she takes contemporary culture very seriously and tries hard to engage with people at a variety of levels and stages.

The book offers a wealth of very specific and detailed material: e.g. a list of advantages or otherwise (10 for, 13 against) on using screens, and on using hymnbooks (16 for, 9 against); a helpful section on material to include in intercessory prayer and so on. One significant drawback is that while she correctly says that worship should not be shaped simply or principally to appeal to the non-Christian, she does not deal with the whole alternative worship movement, where the impetus has not been to appeal to the unbeliever, but to help Christians who are distanced from traditional worship services express their faith. So the book is not as balanced or the bridge between different views on worship that the author hoped or intended, but it is thoroughgoing, stimulating, practical, principled and well focused.

Gordon R. Palmer, East Kilbride

The Westminster Collection of Christian Prayers

Compiled by Dorothy M Stewart,
Westminster John Knox Press,
Louisville and London, 2002. 436 pp,
£20

ISBN 0 664 44460 9

I had been looking for an anthology of prayers for a while when I came across this collection. I have used it, both as a resource for public and personal prayer, and have found it enriching and stimulating.

It includes a broad range of prayers on 179 subjects starting with Advent and finishing with Youth, a list which includes human experiences, like anxiety and temptation. These are arranged alphabetically and this is backed up by a comprehensive index making it easy to locate prayers on particular topics. Some of the prayers are ancient and some modern; some short and some lengthy; some banal and some evocative. It's what you would expect from an anthology – a mixture of the inspirational, the acceptable and the forgettable. This is also its strength. Its breadth means there will be stimulus for almost everyone. You might not use the prayers as they are written, but I'd be surprised if they didn't set you thinking and prompt you to craft your own prayers.

Neil Dougall, North Berwick

Transforming Church: Liberating Structures for Ministry

Robin Greenwood

SPCK, London, 2002. 151pp. £9.99

ISBN 0 281 05208 5

'The clock is ticking, time is running out for inherited patterns of Church'. Robin Greenwood is an Anglican, but suggests that many of 'the preoccupations, shortcomings and strategies explored in this book are shared by many long-standing churches worldwide'. Writing for church leaders he begins by 'Taking Stock'. Little of Greenwood's diagnosis is particularly new: he writes about the Church's loss of identity and the need for change, but recognises the enormous barriers to change in a long-established denomination. Church leaders have a significant place in the process of change and he challenges leaders to contribute to the reshaping of the Church with 'imaginative energy' rather than simply to maintain existing patterns.

Connectedness is the distinctive theme of this book, initially through lots of different areas of knowledge: Quantum field theory, Gestalt theory, interfaith prayer, among other kinds of knowledge, are described, though it is not immediately clear why. He goes on to write about 'partnership in God's mission': there needs to be connection between our understanding of God and the character of the Church; ministry involves all of the people, not just 'clergy'; the church should be a connected community where everybody counts.

He describes the Local Ministry movement within the Anglican Church through five different diocesan strategies – from South Africa, Australia, Michigan in the United States of America, and Derby and Chelmsford in England – in each of which we are shown how 'ministry as partnership' is being achieved, with the involvement of people other than ordained clergy in the leadership and ministry of local churches.

The book has a distinctive Anglican slant; some of the questions raised about hierarchy and leadership apply only in Episcopal churches. Equally, some of the material on the theories of knowledge is difficult to grasp. Nonetheless, many of the questions this little book raises are profoundly challenging to any long-standing denomination's structures on the matter of leadership and collaborative ministry. It is not always an easy read, but there are nuggets of insight that make the digging valuable.

*James S. Dewar, Juniper Green,
Edinburgh*

The Challenge of Islam to Christians

David Pawson

Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2003.
196pp. £7.99

ISBN 0 340 86189 4

David Pawson's book, *The Challenge of Islam to Christians* is thought-provoking and makes sobering reading. The intention of this internationally respected Bible scholar is clear; in the face of a fast-growing and increasingly militant

Islamic community, UK Christians need a wake-up call. The author foresees Britain becoming an Islamic country sometime in the not too distant future. The missionary zeal and strategic planning of Muslims, who have set their sights on Britain becoming the first-ever West European Islamic nation, will prevail.

This book is not presented as a scholarly analysis of the aims and intentions of militant Islam in Britain, although it is that. It is presented as a prophetic message from God to the UK Church. The inspiration and compulsion to write this book came from God, so like Amos, Pawson can but prophesy. Drawing on decades of experience in Christian ministry, the author contrasts a declining UK Church with a glowing Islamic community, and sees the writing on the wall for the Church. The most controversial sections of the book deal with the spiritual origins of Islam and the Muslim rejection of the divinity of Christ. Pawson refuses to be constrained by the demands of political correctness as he deals with these crucial issues.

Two criticisms could be made of the book. More attention could have been given to the significant impact of secularism on the Muslim community. Also, the question of Muslim identity in Britain today could have been investigated. The majority of young British Muslims are not jihadists or Al Qu'ida supporters, they are men and women torn between the conflicting demands of fundamentalist Islam and secular hedonism. It is apparent that barring revival, Islam will one day become the largest faith grouping in the UK, (already more Muslims attend mosques on Fridays than Anglicans attend church on Sundays); however, that is not the same as saying that Britain will become an Islamic country. All faith groups in the West today are being challenged by the Goliath of secular materialism.

The ultimate challenge of this book, according to Pawson, is to call the Church in the UK to repentance.

Book reviews

Only then can the disaster he has prophesied be averted.

Robert Smith, Birmingham

Exploring Natural Church Development

Mike Booker

Grove Evangelism Series, No. 55,
Grove Books Ltd., Cambridge, 2001.
24pp. £2.50.

ISBN 1 85174 473 8

Natural Church Development has become better known over the last couple of years through the involvement of the British Church Growth Association. A significant amount of resource material has now been produced in English, much of it written by Christian Schwartz, the German church growth scholar whose research and ideas lie behind the programme. So what is NCD and does it work?

This booklet is an outsider's look at the concepts behind NCD and an assessment of its value, including stories of the experience of three congregations. At its heart NCD is about congregational health rather than numbers. The health of a congregation can be measured by how well it scores in each of eight quality characteristics. It has been the experience of the researchers that congregations scoring 65 or more (as against a national average of 50) on each characteristic that the church is a growing church. NCD takes a biotic approach, providing what is needed for growth to take place naturally.

Those considering doing a serious health check of congregational life would do well read this booklet to see if NCD is for them. It lays out the concepts in a way easy to understand and reflects on the strengths and weakness of the approach. The stories of three very different congregations will illustrate possible local reactions to the process and its benefits.

Jared Hay, Balerno

Book reviews

Steps Along Hope Street: My Life in Cricket, the Church and the Inner City

David Sheppard

Hodder and Stoughton, 2002. 336pp.
£17.99

ISBN 0340861169

This is the record of a man, converted after listening to Donald Barnhouse while a student at Cambridge, who achieved distinction in the cricketing world but went on to apply his Christian faith and convictions to the world of the underprivileged, unemployed and disadvantaged. After University, and a period as curate in Islington, he became Warden of the Mayflower Family Centre, then Bishop of Woolwich before ending up as Bishop of Liverpool. He developed a strong social conscience and a passion for justice and social righteousness. Such a stance caused him to cross social and religious barriers and to fight against sectarianism and bureaucratic insensitivity. It also led him to impatience with the 'just exposition' of scripture so common among his fellow evangelicals and to insist, in all preaching, on relevance and application. Considerable space is devoted to his friendship with the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool and the positive results which flowed from that relationship. He is honest about his approach to ministry and his evangelical background and every pastor would benefit from his description of his own personal disciplines, devotional habits and use of sabbaticals. This book is essential reading for all who share David Sheppard's call to communicate a full orbed Gospel to a society like ours. It is warmly recommended.

James Taylor, Alva

Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians

Tom Wright

S.P.C.K., London, 2002. 177 pp.

ISBN 0 281 05304 9

This book is one of a series of commentaries by Tom Wright, intended eventually to cover the whole New Testament. As the title suggests, it is aimed at the widest possible readership. It is written at a popular level in non-theological language. Any words which would be unfamiliar to someone with no prior Bible knowledge are printed in bold, and are defined in a 15-page glossary at the back.

Each epistle is divided into short sections, suitable for daily reading, usually consisting of a few verses of text followed by about three pages of comment. The author's own translation is clear and fresh, and his comment usually starts with an anecdote and ends in practical application, with a clear explanation of the text in between. No-one could accuse it of being dry or boring, and ordinary church members will find much that is helpful in its pages. Ministers will find it very useful for illustrations and applications.

While I appreciated this commentary, there were aspects of it with which I was unhappy. Throughout it Wright prefers to talk of 'the faithfulness of Jesus' rather than 'faith in Jesus'. For example, in Galatians 2:16 he translates 'a person is not declared 'righteous' by works of the Jewish law, but through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah'. [NIV: 'a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ'.] The definition of 'faith' in the glossary is vague.

It was disconcerting to have the Holy Spirit always denoted without capital letters [since 'Paul shifts easily to and fro between God's spirit and the human spirit, and it's easier to keep the same form', page 29]. More of an effort could have been made to emphasize his full Personhood. Satan also is seen as more of a force than a personal being [page 105]. The eternal nature of God's wrath tends to be neglected in favour of the purely temporal. The 'curse of the law' in Galatians 3, for example, is interpreted as foreign oppression [pages 33, 34]. This commentary is intended 'for everyone', but I personally would

recommend it only to those who can read with discernment.

Tom McWhirter, Glenluce

Teaching Matthew

David Jackman & William Philip

Proc. Trust Media, 2003. 233p.

ISBN 1 85792 877 6

This book is written specifically to encourage preachers to preach systematically through the Gospel of Matthew. It is not a commentary. It is not a detailed verse by verse study of the gospel. Anyone expecting that would be disappointed. It does however dip into each chapter and readers will find many helpful insights into some of the more difficult parts of the book. As someone committed to systematic exposition in my preaching I don't find it too difficult when I have chosen the passage I have to preach to get down to study the content of the verses before me. What I do have difficulty with is seeing the big picture – seeing the overall theme of the book and seeing just how the passage in question fits into the overall sweep of the book. Now if you like me struggle in this kind of way you will find this book invaluable. Chapters of the Gospel are grouped together in bigger themes and always the reader is referred back to Matthew's main aim in writing the gospel. As well as many helpful comments on each chapter of the Gospel, each chapter of the book ends with a variety of helpful suggestions as to how these chapters might be preached, dividing up the chapters into suitable sections for preaching with a heading summing up the main theme.

The writers are not interested in encouraging a Lloyd-Jones detailed approach to preaching but rather seem keen to help us just get on with the job and preach through the book. Every so often there are some gems of quotes which will be great to use whenever you decide to preach on Matthew. I haven't preached Matthew yet and can't wait!

Willie Black, Stornoway